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Looking for Miriam

By Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Art by Pat Morrissey

The rain fell hot on the grimy streets, sending clouds of dust into the air. I pulled my coat tight around my neck, suddenly wishing for my old uniform of trenchcoat, black tie and briefcase. It would make me feel legitimate, less out of place.

The city had been calling for rain, but apparently couldn't afford it until today. Some philanthropist had tossed in a couple of million bucks to pay the guys who owned the dome and the rain-making machines. They warned us before turning the dome on and, as I left the apartment, I heard the mechanism squealing closed above me. Even then, I forgot to bring an umbrella.

Little lapses like that frightened me.

The rain splattered beside me in thick, warm drops that smelled like motor oil and grease. Kids turned their faces toward the downpour, trying to catch the drops with their tongues. I remember when I thought rain tasted like a hundred-year-old French wine. But the doctors at that fancy hospital never bothered to fix my sense of smell. When I eat eggs, they taste of ragweed, and when I smell rain, I get motor oil and grease.

They say my kind of injury doesn't affect my sense of smell. They say I'm making that up so I can go back to the hospital where life is easy. Easy. Yeah.

Anyway, that day — yesterday — I was walking down Burnside, past the old buildings that someone had turned into shopping malls half a century ago, and I was looking, as I always do, for Miriam.

Kids filled the street, acting as if it was a holiday, and I guess it was. The city always cut down to half power on the day it activated the dome and that meant no computers, which meant no school. Several disgruntled people huddled in a light rail booth, arguing about whether or not they should share a cab. I scanned them quickly — two businesswomen in tight leather boots and matching headpieces, a construction worker wearing a uniform jammed with computer chips, and a slender, sleepy-looking man with a baby in a sling around his waist. I had begun to wonder if I would ever see her, if she had left Portland for a place with fewer memories.

And that was when she appeared, crossing the street, her long black hair swinging behind her back, her skin-tight pants clinging to her shapely legs. I ran to her, pushing past the kids and dodging the oil-scented puddles that had formed along the curbs.

"Miriam!" I called. "Miriam!"

She kept walking as if she hadn't heard — as if the rain wasn't there, as if the kids weren't there, as if I wasn't there. I ran up behind her and caught the scent of cinnamon and cloves drifting from her hair. The correct scent. That should have warned me, but it didn't. I grabbed the soft flesh of her upper arm and shoved her forward. She tripped on the curb, then stumbled across the walk. I pushed her against the brick wall of the building.

"Goddammit, Miriam," I said as I turned her around. And then I stopped. Her eyes were blue and her skin too light. She was pressing her fingers against a pocket alarm, the expensive kind that brought the cops in less than ten seconds.

"Sorry," I breathed and ran. I bumped into kids and splashed through puddles, flailing my arms like a crazy man ...

... which is what I probably am. I take a drag off my cigarette and then stub it out. Tobacco is illegal, but worth the price because it deadens the sense of smell, gives me a chance to forget that the world isn't what it used to be.

You're obsessed with *Miriam*, my shrink tells me, and he doesn't know the half of it. I think *Miriam*, dream *Miriam*, maybe even am *Miriam* sometimes. You've got to let her go, Ben. She can't be part of your life anymore.

Can't be, because I can't find her.

I have two memories of *Miriam*. Strong ones that have stayed with me since I woke up after the last operation. I can guess what order the memories happened in, but it seems as if the most recent happened first. They overlap each other like a dream vision.

In the first, I'm reading to her — we always read books aloud to each other — and she is frowning at me, like she is concentrating hard. I know I am reading well. I can hear my voice, a rich baritone, forming the words as if I have spoken them before, as if they're mine and not those of an anonymous author. She sits on the bed, her back against the wall and those long legs tucked under her, and she is waiting. I feel high, drunk. She clasps her hands together tightly and her knuckles are white. I reach the end of the page and feel sad. There is no more. The author stopped in the



PAUL MORRISSE

middle of the sentence, and the story is gone, unfinished, forever. I go back to the top of the page where the story starts in the middle of a sentence. "Turn the page, Ben," she says, and her words are like a revelation. I reach down and touch the bottom of the page, feeling its thinness, and I turn it. More words. Different words. Words I haven't seen before. I look up to thank her, but she swoops down on me, takes the book and tosses it across the room. "I give up," she says and leaves me.

Only to return seconds later. Except that she is not returning. This is an earlier memory. I'm sitting in the same spot, typing into a pocket computer — a grocery list. Miriam is sitting on the bed, naked, laughing at me. We don't want to leave — that's why we're buying groceries the expensive way. She has challenged me. How many days can we make love without wanting to see anyone else, be somewhere different? How many?

I reach into the ashtray, remove the cigarette butt and light it again. My hands are shaking. My body is shaking. They put me back together so that I can sit alone in an empty room with only memories for company.

The doctors call it the result of a fall. A bad fall, where I landed on my head. Miriam wasn't hurt. She hadn't even been there. I had been alone and helpless and nearly died.

Sometimes I think they should have let me die. They patched the brain, left me constantly drunk and chronically stupid — too stupid, in fact, to know something simple, like when to turn a page. Then I got the second operation, the one you have to apply for, the experimental one that puts your brain back together. Only I didn't apply for it. I didn't know enough to fill out the forms. And Miriam didn't fill them out for me. Some kindly old doctor did. By the time I had become eligible, Miriam had left.

Sometimes I think when I find her, I'll kill her. What else do you do with a woman who leaves when things get tough? Maybe we never said that "till death do us part" line, but we did talk about forever. I guess talking wasn't enough.

And sometimes I think that killing her is the injury's idea. I don't remember being violent before and I'm not really sure I'm violent now, except when I see Miriam. Except when I think I see Miriam.

I tuck my cigarettes in my pocket, pick up a jacket and leave the apartment. The free apartment, at least until the shrink clears me to find work. He says I'm too angry now. Too angry. I grab the rail to protect myself in case I fall. Maybe I wouldn't be angry if I worked. I wouldn't be thinking of Miriam all the time.

The stairs are steep and walking down them makes me dizzy. But I make myself walk them every day. The shrink says that's good, just like he says it's good that more pieces of the past come to me every day. He says my obsession with Miriam is blocking my recovery. I say my obsession with Miriam is my recovery.

Like now. It came to me in a dream last night that

the reason I always look for Miriam on Burnside is because she works in one of those old buildings. Information officer for the Greater Portland Metropolitan Area. She used to say that jobs didn't come any better. Another piece of the past clicking into place. See, doc? Score a point for my addled brain.

I open the door and step onto the street. The rain has stopped, but the dome still covers the city, casting everything in a filtered light. The shrink told me once that the city used to get too much rain. Sometimes I think he lies to me just to see how gullible I really am.

It must be early. Commuters are getting off the light rail, adjusting their headresses, clutching the pockets that hold their computers. The guy who sells me cigarettes lifts computers. He says they hold the secret to everything. Maybe I should lift the shrink's computer and see if it holds the secret to me.

I slip into the crowd, too casually dressed to be a commuter, too neat to be a bum. People ignore me as they trudge to their jobs. I trudge with them, and slip into the information offices of the Greater Portland Metropolitan Area. A huge touch-screen greets me, offering me the secret to every nook in the city. I want it to take me to Miriam. I touch the square offering personal assistance, then lean against the empty desk to wait.

It's too much to hope that they'll send Miriam. By now, she's probably too important to help walk-ins. I stare at the reception room and try not to panic. Everything is done in black and white. The sofa is white, the pillows black. The computer-rendered artwork is geometric forms in black and white with a touch of red. The floor tiles alternate, black, white, and shine as if no one has walked on them in days.

Finally, I hear the hush of the elevator, and a man appears. He is small, maybe half a foot shorter than I am, and he wears old-fashioned blue jeans with a tie-dye shirt. A period dresser. Miriam had never told me that the office allowed period dressing.

"Yes?" he asks in a carefully monitored tone that people reserve for something out of the ordinary.

I take a deep breath and say, "I'm looking for Miriam Benson."

His expression remains blank.

"She works here," I add.

"Oh." He pulls out his pocket computer. Secrets of the universe, held in the palm of his hand. "Why do you want to see her?"

"It's personal." Very personal. Maybe if I find out why she left, I can get past this obsession, move on to Something More Constructive, which the shrink has been trying to get me to do all along.

The man looks me over, maybe trying to make sure I'm not some kind of menace, then punches a few things into his computer. "Who did you say you wanted?"

I frown. A ploy? Has Miriam said she didn't want to see me? I haven't even told the guy my name. "Miriam Benson."

He continues punching. "And she works here?"

"She used to."

For a few minutes, the only sound in that sterile

(Continued to page 41)

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Three If by Norton

By Ralph Roberts

Art by Courtney Skinner

*Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Bugface O'Lear.*

It was getting dark as Bugface O'Lear roared down Route 2 into Cambridge. He switched on the headlamp, reveling in the smooth sound of his Harley-Davidson XLH's 883 cubic centimeters of Bugface-hauling power. Looking up, Bugface saluted an old woman out walking her dog. That was when the package strapped behind him popped and fizzed.

"What the h—," Bugface started to say when the flat asphalt of Route 2, the old lady and her dog, the street lamps, the buildings of Cambridge, and the skyline of Boston all disappeared in a weird shimmer and swoosh. Bugface was suddenly too busy for speech.

The bike was blasting much, much too fast down a narrow dirt road, hemmed in by trees. Bugface didn't try to understand it, he just laid the Harley over, dirt-tracking around a sharp curve and gritting his teeth as he barely missed a substantial oak tree. Trying to slow to a safe speed and keep his seat while bouncing over the hard ruts and rocks of the trail, Bugface was suddenly confronted by two men on horseback. With no place else to go, he shrugged and zoomed between them.

Achieving a manageable speed, Bugface decided to keep on trucking. From the brief glimpse he'd had of the panic-stricken horses — rearing, their riders flying over saddle pommels — as the screaming Harley had threaded the needle through their midst, he didn't think the two men were in much of a mood to be questioned. Horseback riders in town, Bugface thought in disgust, were a real nuisance.

Then it dawned on him that he wasn't in town anymore. This was not just some wrong turn onto a side street. There were huge trees all around and no more Cambridge, nor anything much else of civilization that was revealed in the white-lit cone of the Harley's headlamp. Except now, coming into view, a weather-worn plank nailed to a tree. On it was a paper of some sort. Sliding to a halt under the plank, Bugface tried to puzzle out the poor printing and funny spelling. Something about a tea party recently held by some group calling itself the Sons of Liberty.

"What's wrong with beer?" Bugface demanded of the Harley as he continued on down the horribly bumpy poor excuse for a road. He didn't care much for tea

drinkers or anything else British. Especially Nortons and Triumphs. Everybody knew that Harley made the best bikes in the world, and how dare them Limeys even try to compete. The Harley XLH purred its deep-throated agreement.

Bugface O'Lear, despite a propensity for talking to his bike — only crazy people talked to themselves — was no fool. He carefully rode along the ruts and discussed the situation with the Harley.

"This is what I get for letting Ferd talk me into being a bloomin' delivery boy of all things." The Harley kept its own counsel as Bugface recalled the conversation earlier that evening (some future evening?) up at Ferd's office in Waltham. Some kind of engineering laboratory, Bugface didn't know what kind and couldn't care less. They didn't make motorcycles there.

"It's a temporal displacement device," Ferd had told him, wiping his pudgy hands nervously on the front of his white lab coat and indicating a small device on the workbench. Bugface, less than impressed, his six-foot-two height towering over his brother-in-law, had said nothing and continued combing the bugs out of his beard with one grease-grimed hand. In the summer Bugface did a lot of riding, hence his name.

"For God's sake, Marvin! It's a time machine! A fantastic invention with its own battery powerpack."

"Call me Bugface," Bugface said. "And send it UPS."

Ferd had groaned in frustration. It was always hard to talk to Bugface, unless it was about bikes. Even his wife, Bugface's sister Marlene, had trouble understanding the man's obsession with the big Harleys, and she'd known him a lot longer.

"Listen, Bugface. I told you that the government's pulling a sneak inspection to see how we're coming on the contract. They want to test it tonight. At M.I.T., where they have access to calibrated test equipment. You said you needed the money."

"I ain't strapping nothing on my bike!" Bugface had argued. "Drive it down yourself."

Ferd had sighed. "I explained that, too. We are up against it with this blasted surprise inspection. I must get some paperwork done and ready for them in the morning. It's too late to get a messenger. You said you'd take it. That you could use the money for that other bike you want to buy. The restored one."

Bugface knew his eyes had lit up then. "Yeah,"

he'd answered enthusiastically. "A 1929 Harley-Davidson 74. Four-stroke, F-head vee-twin. 1207 cc. That's 74 cubic inches, Ferd. That's why they called it the '74'. A real bike!"

"Right, right," Ferd had said, hastily wrapping the device. "Now you be careful and don't jar this any."

"Uh huh," Bugface mumbled. Then more strongly: "You better not tell any of my buddies I hauled something on my bike." He'd then accepted the package and left.

Now he was rolling along. Lord knew where or when. Maybe he should have heeded Ferd's warnings a little closer. The wheelie up the interstate ramp and those jumps over the humps on Route 2 obviously weren't the smartest things he could've done. But might as well find out the damage. He stopped the bike in the center of the trail and put it up on the kickstand, leaving the headlamp blazing. Not much worry about oncoming traffic here. And vehicular pollution was limited to the kind you stepped in.

Unstrapping and unwrapping what Ferd had called a "temporal displacement device," Bugface carried it around to the light and looked it over. Not much to see, he noted in disgust. Just your standard black box with two switches and a socket for a computer connection. Bugface was familiar with that, having recently carefully studied the latest computer-aided motorcycle diagnostic machine down at his local Harley dealer's.

Grunting disgust, Bugface carefully cushioned the device in its wrapping and strapped it back on the Harley. The destination and, he sincerely hoped, the return were evidently programmed in by computer. The switches were merely labeled, "activate" and "reset." Bugface decided to check the place out a little before he tried "reset." See if he couldn't raise a little more dough toward his goal of owning that Harley-Davidson 74.

"Bound to be something a smart guy from the future can do to turn a buck here," Bugface informed the Harley as he started it up and continued on down the narrow dirt track. He was not worried about further damage to the temporal device. All that had already been done, though he did resolve to hold off on the wheelies for awhile. And was he glad that he had filled the bike with gas just before Cambridge. He had a feeling that Exxon didn't have a whole lot of stations around here.

It wasn't long until the trees thinned out and Bugface found himself approaching a small town, the buildings lit here and there by what appeared to be candlelight. A faded painted sign flashed by with Bugface only catching the word "Boston." He nodded in satisfaction and tried to remember what little he had learned about history in high school. The poster he'd seen back in the woods about the Sons of Liberty, the men on horseback, the wooden buildings around him now, the masts of sailing ships lit up as he passed down a waterfront street. Late seventeen hundreds. American Revolutionary War times.

"Wow!" Bugface told the Harley in awe. "I've got the only bike in the whole damned world!"

He noticed that people were running out of build-

ings, some in nightgowns and sleeping caps, and pointing fearfully at him and the deafening buzzsaw-humming Harley. "Guess they go to bed early here," he said, a grin splitting his beard. He sped up the Harley and zipped away from the growing crowd toward the center of town. Better find a place to park, he thought. Conserve gas and cut off the racket that was drawing so much attention to him and the bike.

Bugface throttled back the engine and free-wheeled down a deserted cobblestoned street, outdistancing and — he hoped — losing the rudely awakened crowds behind him. Ahead, he saw a small shop with a single candle in the window. Good. He needed to question somebody alone. See what he could do to earn some quick loot and hit the old "reset" button back to his own time before he and the Harley got burned for witches or something. That could ruin his bike. He cut the engine and coasted the rest of the way silently down a slight hill.

A small, shifty-looking man came out of the shop and watched Bugface park the bike. By the side of the door was a brass plaque that read simply, "Paul Revere, Silversmith." Bugface cut his light and approached the small man, who was standing somewhat agog, eyeing the heat-pinging Harley. He spoke to Bugface in a reedy, slippery voice.

"God's blood, man! What in hell is that infernal noisy contraption? How did you get that lantern to burn so bright?"

Bugface noted that the fellow smelled worse than himself, which was going some because Bugface never been known to waste money on junk like deodorant now that inflation had made motorcycle parts so dear.

"It's a Harley-Davidson Sportster 883, stupid. Don't you know nothing?" Bugface said. "So you're Paul Revere, huh?"

The little man gave another glance to the Harley and a longer one at Bugface's glaring demeanor, obviously deciding now was not the time to ask what a ... — well, whatever the big bearded man had called it — was. With a crafty look that was not completely lost on Bugface, he motioned him inside the candle-lit shop.

"No, no. I'm not Revere. Elias Stonebotham's my name. Paul's taken ill tonight and I'm doing his errands. And you are?"

"Bugface is the name," stated Bugface with rough dignity that discouraged comments about his moniker. He picked up one of the many silver objects that filled the shelves of the shop. "What's the date, Stonebottom?"

"Put that back, if you will," Elias said and Bugface reluctantly did so. "And it's *Stonebotham*." He paused a moment, sizing up the big visitor to the shop. The estimate of Bugface's brain-power came in low. He smiled oily. "April 18th."

"What year?" asked Bugface, coming closer to where Stonebotham had retreated behind the shop's counter. There was something familiar about that date. What was it? Maybe he should've paid more attention in high school. But there were so many motorcycle magazines and a fellow had to keep up with the field. Wouldn't want Harley to bring out a new model and him not know about it.

"Why, 1775," Stonebotham said, revising his estimate of Bugface's wit even lower. This oaf could well be the answer to the unpleasant problem that Revere had thoughtlessly stuck him with by coming down with the vapors.

"Yeah," Bugface said, comprehension dawning. He had always been good at remembering numbers, though he tried to restrict this to parts numbers for his bike. "The night of April 18th, 1775. The midnight ride of Paul Revere!"

"What? It's not midnight yet. And the ride's not supposed to start until I receive the signal anyway. But it could be before midnight." Stonebotham paused and squinted at Bugface suspiciously. "Did Warren send you to check up on me?"

"Warren who?"

"Joseph Warren. He's the patriot leader what give Paul this job that I'm having to fill in on for him."

"You wearing a wig?" Bugface suddenly demanded suspiciously.

"Certainly," Elias Stonebotham replied loftily, somewhat less than effectively since even Bugface could see that the white-powdered hairpiece was cheap and soiled. As was the rest of Stonebotham's attire of greasy leather jerkin and coarse cloth trousers. Obviously not a regular employee of Revere's elegant silver shop.

"I'm looking for work," Bugface said, knowing he didn't have time to muck around too long. In daylight everybody was going to be asking tomfool questions about the Harley.

Elias Stonebotham tried to keep the gloating out of his voice. He just couldn't believe this bumpkin was playing into his hands so easily. "Well, my lad, you're in luck, 'dead y're. It so happens that Paul Revere, being somewhat inconvenienced with the vapors, has paid me ... ah ... twenty shillings to do a short errand for him tonight. Being overwhelmed by the press of other business, I'll forward this entire sum to you merely for taking care of this minor matter."

"Yeah?" Bugface said, while reflecting that the last guy who had called him "my lad" was probably still picking parts of the Triumph he'd been riding out of his teeth. "Twenty shillings don't sound like much. What are shillings?"

Stonebotham made with his oily smile again and pulled a small cloth pouch from the waist pocket of his jerkin. It clinked as he opened it and poured several coins onto the countertop. "Pine-tree shillings," he said. "Good, solid silver money."

"Uh huh," Bugface grunted, thinking rapidly. His sister Marlene had once been into coin collecting the way he had always been into bikes. She'd told him that antique silver coins were rare, and worth a lot of money. Here this wimp was wanting to give him twenty! Should be able to sell them for more than enough to buy that Harley 74. He could care less whether they had pine trees or oak trees on them.

"Just a short ride," Stonebotham said, pressing his advantage. "When we get the signal, you ride to Lexington and warn Adams and Hancock that the Redcoats are coming. On the way, you wake everybody up and send them to Concord ready to fight the British. Can't miss it. Signs along the way, or you

can ask directions of the people you rouse up."

"All right," Bugface agreed, thinking that if it was left to this colonial nerd, the Midnight Ride would never be made and the blasted British would win. Which would mean that Harleys would never be made and everybody in the fifty American colonies would be riding Triumphs and Nortons. He shuddered. It was too horrible to contemplate. He reached for the money.

Stonebotham was faster. "I'll just put those back in the bag for you ... ah ... Bugface. Quaint name, that," he said pulling the drawstring of the bag tight. The bag slipped from his fingers and hit the floor behind the counter. "Pardon my clumsiness," he laughed. He stooped, picked up the bag and clunked it down on the counter in front of Bugface. "You can use the horse tied behind the shop."

"I got transportation," Bugface informed him with a growl, pocketing the bag of coins. How dare this creep even think he'd prefer a hay-burner to a Harley. Still smoldering, he wandered aimlessly around the dimly lit shop, again picking up and examining the various objects of silver. Old Paul did some really neat work. Come to think of it, he'd heard that Revere silverware was worth a heck of a lot.

"Leave that stuff alone!" Elias Stonebotham ordered. "Go to the window and keep close watch on that church tower out yonder. One lantern means they come by land, two by sea. Then you ride."

Bugface growled but did as he was told, choosing the window without the candle. He was almost immediately rewarded by the sight of two lanterns waving from the distant church tower.

"Two of 'em," he said excitedly, starting to get into the swing of things now.

"They're coming by water," Stonebotham said, walking over and taking a confirming look for himself. "Get on your noisy mechanical horse and ride. Take this street to the bottom of the hill. Turn left and that will take you out to the Lexington Road. Make all haste, man. The Sons of Liberty are depending on you!"

"Yeah," Bugface said in awe. "Yeah, they are. I gotta do it for my country. So it can become my country." He turned and stomped out to the patiently waiting Harley, but not before catching a gleam of relieved exhalation in the shifty eyes of Elias Stonebotham. Little twerp wouldn't have gone, he thought. He started up the bike, cut on the headlamp, and roared off.

He wheeled the Harley down to the intersection and turned left as instructed. No need to worry about noise now. He wanted to wake everybody up. Tell them the doggone Limeys were coming and had to be beat back so that the United States and Harley-Davidson could come into being. Down with taxation without representation, foreign domination, and bloody English motorcycles.

Ahead of the Harley appeared a line of men stretched across the street. "First customers," Bugface told the Harley, then yelled loudly: "The redcoats are coming! The redcoats are coming!" Just like in the history books. This was fun!

Then — suddenly sensing white-clayed crossed

belts, bright red uniforms, and Brown Bess muskets leveled his way — Bugface realized that these were the redcoats!

"Outa my way, you Limey wimps!" he shouted, opening the Harley's throttle wide. The angry snarl of the big bike echoed back from the shops and houses of colonial Boston as the Harley scattered the British soldiers like tenpins. "Neither rain nor snow," he vowed to the Harley, "shall slay this courier from pointing his rounds."

He blasted on, bellowing his message. The roar of the bike and Bugface's leather-lunged voice were a combination insuring instant attention from the Bostonians along his way. But they were soon out of Boston and he had to adjust speed downward to avoid losing control on the minimal mud-rutted trail that was laughingly called the Lexington Road by a sign painted on a warped, rotten board nailed to a tree.

Ten minutes later Bugface and the Harley bounded up to the first collection of weathered buildings he'd seen since leaving Boston. He had no idea of the hamlet's name and could care less. A few lights were already lit, people forewarned of the Harley's less than stealthy approach.

Bugface parked the bike and stomped purposely up to the front door of the largest house. Not having time to mess around, he hauled back and kicked hell out of the door. The heavy oak door went down like a poleaxed steer with a resounding crash and a considerable cloud of dust. A young man in flannel nightgown and stocking hat was holding a candle just beyond where the door had landed.

"You head of this here household?" Bugface demanded. The young man gulped, staring mouth-agape at the huge bearded apparition blocking the doorway.

"Er ... no ... no, sir. That'd be my Paw."

"Well! Where's he at?"

"Under the door, if it please you, sir."

"This is no time to lay around, the damn British are coming!" Bugface informed the young man's father as he whipped the door off him and tossed it out into the yard, being careful not to hit the Harley. The older man climbed weakly to his feet, keeping fearful eyes fastened on Bugface.

"Ah ... Redcoats ye say?"

"You got it, pops. Now I want you and your son to get dressed, load up your flintlocks, and rouse up the rest of this here village. Then y'all haul tail for Concord. There's gonna be some sons of Norton up there tomorrow trying to come across the bridge. Don't let the suckers do it." Bugface's history was starting to come back to him now. The Shot Heard Round the World and all that good stuff.

"Sons of what?"

Bugface snorted in disgust. If these eighteenth-century yokels didn't even know the difference between British junkers like Nortons or Triumphs and great American machines like his beloved Harley, it was gonna be a long war.

"Never mind, pops. Just get up there and shoot lobsterbacks."

"Well, what if I don't want to?" the man said, regaining a bit of the composure knocked out of him

by the Bugface-shattered door.

"Why then," Bugface explained reasonably, "I'll come back here and beat the ever-loving crap out of you and everybody in this here burg." Bugface looked big and mean because he was big and mean.

The man whirled to his son, patriotism suddenly flaring — fanned to a flame by Bugface's impeccable logic. "Don't just stand there boy! Get dressed and fetch the rifles!"

Bugface shook his fist in encouragement and bounded back out to the Harley. He blasted on, up the Lexington Road, employing much the same technique at each of many other little hamlets the hot-white headlamp of the Harley revealed. Behind him, a veritable river of wide-awake and suddenly enthusiastic patriots were beating a path to Concord Bridge and destiny.

"It's a coming!" Bugface told the bike. "We gonna win! Hot dogs, apple pie, Mom, and Harleys for all them what got good taste." And the farmers continued to heed his clarion call to arms as he and the big bike thundered through the dark countryside.

Bugface was feeling right pleased with himself when he rolled up to Jonas Clarke's parsonage in Lexington, where he'd been told that the patriot leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock were staying. He parked and wearily clomped in to receive his justly deserved rewards and accolades. "Maybe another sack of coins," he mumbled happily.

A group of men, already dressed, waited for him inside the spacious but low-ceilinged common room of the home. Two distinguished-looking men, somewhat to the fore of the group, stood with hands clasped behind backs. Bugface took them to be Adams and Hancock.

"Howdy," he said, a smug look of satisfaction peeking from under his beard. "Name's Bugface. The redcoats are a coming. But I done"

His voice trailed off as Adams and Hancock both brought huge horse pistols from behind their backs. The *CLICK* as they cocked them seemed to echo off the wall in that suddenly silent room.

"Pears that one of those redcoats is already here," said the older man, the one who had to be Samuel Adams.

"Not for long," John Hancock replied, raising his arm and sighting along his huge pistol at Bugface. "As soon as we hear from Paul Revere, we can use this one for target practice. Or maybe I'll carve my autograph on him until he talks. What about it, spy? Care to tell us of British troop movements?"

"Ain't no spy," Bugface said, sidling a little closer to the two men. The pistols followed him unwaveringly. Their barrels looked big enough for Bugface to drive his Harley into. The others didn't appear to be armed. "Paul Revere has done come down with the vapors. I took his place."

"Hmmm," Adams said, nodding. "That could be. Paul did look a mite sickly when last I was in Boston."

"In that case," Hancock said, eyes still locked on Bugface. "What's the password?"

"Er," Bugface said, with a sinking feeling like to that of being on an express elevator with broken cables. "He didn't say nothing about no password."

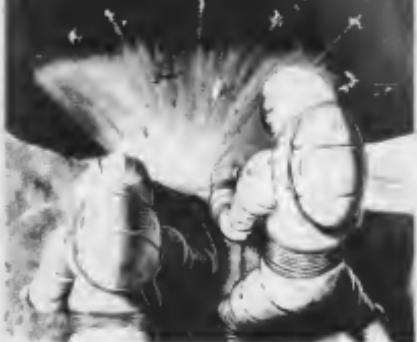
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Tales of the Human Mind



March-April 1988 \$3.00

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"Ah ha!" Hancock exclaimed. "No password. Paul Revere would have given you the sign and counter-sign."

"Weren't Paul Revere what gave me this job?" Bugface said, gauging his distance to the two pistol holders. "He got sick and give it to Elias Stoneybottom, who paid me twenty shillings to do it instead."

"That's Stonebotham," Adams corrected absentmindedly. Then: "John, he may have a point there. Paul told me that if he couldn't make it, Stonebotham would make the ride for fifty shillings."

"Perhaps, Samuel. On the other hand, we all know that Elias is less than reliable. He could have sold out to the British and they used this method to worm a spy into our midst. And what of that mechanical contrivance outside? That's not American. Must be a recent English invention."

Bugface made his move. It was bad enough to learn that Stonebotham had cheated him out of thirty shillings, but nobody got away with implying that his Harley was an English bike. He dived under Hancock's pistol, bowling over and knocking the breath out of the patriot leader with a satisfying whoosh. Continuing the roll, he ground on over Hancock and came to his feet. Adams was swinging his cannon around to bear, but Bugface solved that problem by simply picking up the nearest man and knocking Adams down with a nifty sideways sling.

Retrieving the two pistols, Bugface threw them through the nearest window, smashing the glass to a shower of silvery splinters in the fitful lamplight.

"Now," Bugface bellowed, slamming his fist into the nearest wall with a building-shaking wallop. "Here's what we gonna do!" The room was silent as everybody gave Bugface their undivided attention. Even Hancock, Adams, and the guy Bugface had thrown at Adams kept eyes riveted to the big bearded man as they struggled to regain their feet.

"You and you!" he thundered, pointing at Hancock and Adams, "are gonna get your colonial rebel butts on your horses and head up for Concord. The rest of you turkeys are going to find rifles and follow them, walking up the countryside as you go. I done got a bunch of men already on their way. Come tomorrow, blow them Britishers back to Boston." The room began to empty rapidly.

John Hancock nodded and limped after the others but Samuel Adams paused for a moment by the scowling Bugface.

"I think," he said, "that we owe you much. Thanks to your timely warning we'll be able to stop the British troops at Concord and save our meager supplies and ammunition stored there. Perhaps this will be enough boost to allow us to finally triumph in this coming rebellion."

"No Triumphs," Bugface said firmly. "Just Harleys." He waved Adams out the door. "Have a nice war now, y'hear?" Then he stalked after them as far as the Harley.

"Good night's work, huh?" he commented to the bike as he unwrapped the temporal displacement device. He straddled the bike and punched the "reset" button.

Suddenly there were bright lights all around and a

blood-curdling SCREEEEECH as a police car skidded broadside trying to miss Bugface sitting out in the middle of the street astride the Harley. While the cop was trying to convince himself that he hadn't really seen some big guy on a motorcycle materialize out of thin air, Bugface started his bike and calmly rode off toward the lab at M.I.T.

His brother-in-law, Ferd, was waiting there, almost completely distraught. "Where you been, Marvin? The people down here called hours ago saying you had never arrived. I rushed right down."

"The name is Bugface," Bugface said, handing Ferd the temporal displacement device. Marlene was the only one allowed to call him Marvin, and she was sensible enough to only do it on major holidays. "April 18th, 1775," he added as an afterthought.

One of the gathered crowd of scientists had the device hooked up to a computer and confirmed that this was indeed true. So they demanded that Bugface tell the whole story, which he did with many interesting (to him) tidbits of motorcycle lore thrown in as a bonus.

"Well," Ferd said as Bugface wound down. "Paul Revere still got credit for the midnight ride, but at least this explains why the history books say the patriots were so eager and so numerous at the Battle of Concord Bridge." He paused and considered the enormity of it all. "So this Elias Stonebotham paid you twenty shillings? Those could be worth a lot of money now, you know."

"That's what he wanted me to think," Bugface replied, removing the pouch from his pocket. He loosened the drawstring and poured out several chunks of lead. "The sucker switched pouches on me when he dropped it behind the counter." Snorting in disgust, he tossed the pouch and its contents into the trashcan, causing several of the scientists to dive in after them.

Ferd ignored the fracas over the historical relics and shook his head. He felt bad that Bugface had gone to all that trouble and gotten cheated. "Too bad, Mar... ah... Bugface."

"I don't know," Bugface said, grinning and unzipping his leather jacket. He began to remove bright silver objects. "You wanna buy some gen-u-wine Revere silver? How about this here salt and pepper shaker set? Got a nice gravy bowl. Woulda got a punch bowl but Stoneybottom was watching me too close. How about some knives and forks? Solid silver antiques."

Moving?

We expect our subscribers to move, but if you want to get your next issue of *Aboriginal* please tell us 45 days before the next issue is due out. For instance, the next issue will be mailed about Jan. 15, so if you are moving please tell us by Dec. 1 what your new address will be. The post office will not always forward second-class mail.

By Darrell Schweitzer



Fantasy

Okay, I've gone and done it, realizing the worst fears of a few of you. A column about fantasy. Rumor has it this Schweitzer character only reviews fantasy anyway. Never mind that my columns don't bear the rumor out: I've met it alive and well and on the hoof. But I have been intending to do one such column for some time now, largely to answer a question asked of me by a writer and editor I respect a lot:

"Is any of that stuff worth reading?"

We have come a long way downhill for such a question to make sense, for it to be asked in good faith. It is, alas, a necessary question. The answer is, of course, yes, but the explanation that goes with the answer requires some length.

I'll try not to cover old ground. We have previously established in my columns, here and in other publications, that:

1. Fantasy is the oldest and most universal form of literature.

2. Fantasy is the older sibling of science fiction. That is, science fiction applies the techniques of realism to the fantastic, trying to keep the imaginary elements within the realm of the rationalistic and — ostensibly — possible. Science fiction emerged about the same time the realistic novel did, at the end of the 18th century. Both are artistic responses to the Industrial Revo-

lution and the beginning of the scientific age.

3. Fantasy is distinguished from myth, religious scripture, and folklore by the element of *deliberate artifice*. It is consciously made up, although it may contain much Truth on some other level. I would argue that the earliest surviving fantasy work is Lucius Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (circa A.D. 180). No one seriously believed he was writing a true story, but, like C.S. Lewis, Apuleius included a large dollop of Truth at the end. (*Isis saves!*)

4. Fantasy has always been regarded with suspicion in Western, particularly American, culture, which regards the most utilitarian realism as the only sort of fiction sufficiently removed from the frivolous to be real Art. Fantasy violates the Protestant Work Ethic of Literature. It even, by way of the Gernsback Delusion — and maybe the Campbell Delusion — that science fiction is supposed to Teach You Something, violates the Protestant Work Ethic of Science Fiction, for all that it often does, subtly, teach. Hence the SF fan's (and sometimes writer's) self-righteous dismissal of "mere fantasy" as something inferior and beneath contempt.

5. American publishers have rarely known what to do with fantasy. For a long time, they published very little, and what they did fit into three categories, all uncomfortably: mainstream, science fiction, and juvenile. Thus T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* was published as mainstream, Avram Davidson's *The Phoenix and the Mirror* was published as science fiction (it

says so right on the spine of the Doubleday edition), and Patricia McKillip's *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* was published as a juvenile.

6. Fantasy as a category, as a commercial genre, is largely the invention of Lester del Rey, who succeeded Lin Carter as fantasy editor of Ballantine Books about 1974. This has been mixed blessing, particularly as Del Rey Books caused the category to be strongly identified with such unutterable atrocities as Terry Brooks's *The Sword of Shannara* and sequels. Fantasy, for the first time, became a formula like the nurse novel or the western (or certain types of science fiction). Sure enough, bad attracts bad. Such bland crap has a readership. Some of those readers become writers, never imagining there is more potential to the form than the mass-production of more bland crap. Worse yet, editors come to be of the opinion that this is what the public expects from such books.

Which of course is why my friend asked the question. He's gazing at shelf after shelf of look-alike books, many of which are indeed not worth reading. Most of them are parts of trilogies or worse, by writers who write little else. So, how is one to tell? Life is too short for a random survey.

Actually, most of the commercial fantasy novels out there are no more badly written than routine science fiction or routine romances (to which they bear a considerable affinity). They just seem, to me at least, more useless.

Good fantasy partakes of

Rating System

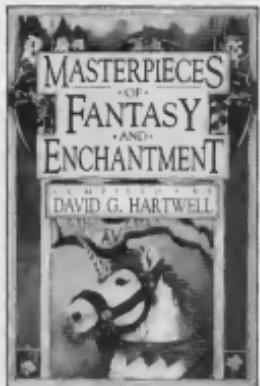
**
*

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

myth and has the power of visionary dreams. It is, as Le Guin has pointed out, true (but not factual — the difference is important, and a chasm!) in a deeper manner than any other form of writing. But another just-so quest novel with standard characters and a not-very-convincing mock-medieval setting is like completely uninspired poetry, technically correct, but dull.

The important thing is not to lose the sensibility that enables us to appreciate the good stuff.

How to find the good stuff? The same way you find good anything else. Explorations. Word of mouth. Sometimes a good cross-sectional anthology, like the following:



Masterpieces of Fantasy and Enchantment
Edited by David G. Hartwell
and Kathryn Cramer
St. Martin's Press, 1988
622 pp., \$19.95

This is the best survey of the development of fantasy I have yet seen, and it may well become the standard volume in its field for decades to come.

Hartwell and Cramer have a good eye for a story, and they know their classics, as is obvious enough from a glance down the table of contents: "The Rule of Names" by Le Guin, Heinlein's "Our Fair City," de Camp and Pratt's "The Green Magician,"

Dunsany's "The Sword of Welleran."

There are also some very rare items, genuine discoveries probably unknown to even the most advanced devotee: three hitherto unreprinted stories by the little-known master Kenneth Morris, and a batch of "Hieroglyphic Tales" by Horace Walpole, the author of *The Castle of Otranto* and inventor of the Gothic Romance. Also there's a novella by Elizabeth Lynn (good enough to make one wonder aloud, "Whatever happened to Elizabeth Lynn?") in its first real publication, reprinted from a hyper-limited, hyper-priced Cheap Street booklet.

The whole range of fantasy is here, from humorous to serious, from Tolkiennesque other-worldly adventure to stories of the fantastic intruding (humorously or seriously) into the contemporary world.

I'm not sure I agree with all of the critical theory that goes into this. Hartwell and Cramer are making a case that modern fantasy has grown largely out of Victorian children's literature, and that stories of the L. Frank Baum sort are the important precursors. (Indeed, Baum is represented with rare stories. So too is a forgotten 19th-century author, Christopher Pearce Cranch, with something called "The Last of the Huggermuggers: A Giant Story," which I found neither very readable nor very convincingly relevant to anything.) I'd concede that the influence of such material is definitely present, but I don't think it the main stream.

Much, much more important are medieval (particularly Arthurian) romance, the traditional folktale (and ballad), and especially *The Arabian Nights* (which produced a huge body of little-studied fantastic fiction in the 18th century, of which William Beckford's *Vathek* is a tail-end development and parody). And I think I could make a case that Shakespeare is as important an influence on modern fantasy as Lewis Carroll.

But there's only one factual statement in this book that I find strange: that Mark Twain only

wrote two fantasy short stories, of which "The Canvasser's Tale" is one. (I can easily name half a dozen, not counting fragments. I'm not sure "The Canvasser's Tale" is one of them.)

And of course there are a couple of writers missing who should be (in my opinion) present. If I had been editing this book I would have dropped Cranch's Huggermuggery to make room for Clark Ashton Smith (probably "Xeethra") and James Branch Cabell, who was, prior to the past decade or so, the best-selling American fantasist. (I'd use "The Wedding Jest.")

But, still, this book is a feast. Let me name some more names:



Moorcock ("Elric at the End of Time"), William Morris ("Lindenborg Pool"), Margaret St. Clair, Wyman Guin, Joanna Russ, John Collier, Gene Wolfe, Avram Davidson, Fritz Leiber, Theodore Sturgeon, Philip K. Dick ("The King of the Elves"), A. Merritt, Poul Anderson. And among the older work, there is one genuinely interesting discovery, an excerpt from *Phantasmion* (1833) by Sara Coleridge (the daughter of Samuel Taylor Coleridge), which may be the first imaginary-world fantasy novel in English. It's quite readable, too. I'd like to see the whole thing republished.

Rating: 4.5

**And now for
something (almost)
completely different:
Killer toasters
from Mars ...**

The Brave Little Toaster

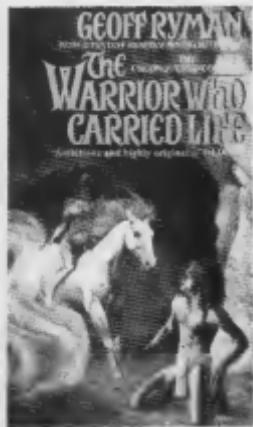
Goes to Mars

By Thomas M. Disch

Doubleday, 1988

72 pp., \$11.95

Whimsy has always been one of the most acceptable forms of American fantasy, and Tom Disch whimsies with the best of them. His *The Brave Little Toaster* (1980) was one of the more inspired bits of lunacy of



recent years, and was a finalist for several awards. It and its sequel are ostensibly children's books, but, like James Thurber's fantasies (*The Thirteen Clocks*, *The Wonderful O*, etc.), they are completely adult in vocabulary and (at least on some level) subject matter, and will, I suspect, mostly be read by older folks.

The sequel is not quite up to the original. One reason is unavoidable: the sheer novelty of a story about a heroic quest carried out by household appliances is gone. The other is not: the villain (a refrigerator the size of the Pyramid of Cheops) folds up too quickly.

The plot itself is splendidly

silly stuff: a boatload of appliances revolt against planned obsolescence and escape to Mars, where they build a civilization of sentient toasters, vacuum cleaners, electric earmuffs, etc. The heroic toaster of the title, along with his friends, a radio, a fan, a calculator, an electric blanket, and a prototype hearing aid invented by Albert Einstein, discover that the Martian appliances are going to invade the Earth to "liberate" terrestrial appliances from biological tyranny.

But it seems that Earthly appliances love the people they serve. Making toast (or whatever) is the purpose of a machine's existence. So the Brave Little Toaster gets elected president of Mars and the Martian appliances see the light.

Fun, but too easy.

Rating: ★★☆

The Warrior Who Carried Life

By Geoff Ryman

Bantam, 1987

198 pp., \$2.95

Yes, this is last year's book (actually published in England in 1985), but I've been meaning to tell you about it for several columns now. It's worth seeking out, and the very antidote for people who think fantasy consists of safe, dumb trilogies about elves.

Ryman is no ordinary commercial fantasist. His *Inferzone* novella, "The Unconquered Country," won both the British Fantasy Award and the World Fantasy Award.

The Warrior Who Carried Life is a quest story, about a single swordperson out to overthrow Evil Overlords, but with a difference. First of all, the protagonist is a mutilated woman who is (briefly) transformed into a handsome warrior. Imagine Clark Ashton Smith with simple prose and real characters.

My only objection is the ending, a dream-like phantasmagoria which just drags on too long.

Ryman can be a brutal writer. His images are vivid, but often vividly hideous. There is very convincing cruelty and suf-

ferring in this book, plus something approximating thematic complexity. Not your usual fantasy at all. No easy outs here. No cardboard castles, and nobody speaks Forsoothly.

Some readers of generic fantasy are going to be very disturbed by this.

Rating: ★★★★☆

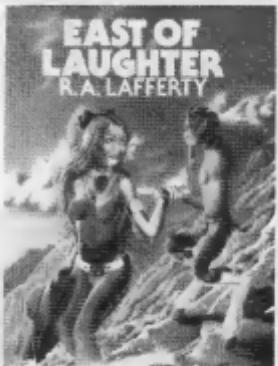
East of Laughter

By R.A. Lafferty

Morrigan Publications, 1988

176 pp., 10 pounds, 95 pence

You can get this from many specialty dealers (American price, about \$20) or directly from the publisher (84 Ivy Ave., Bath, Avon, BA2 1AN, England), and you should. I don't think there is going to be a paperback. R.A.



Lafferty is an utterly unique writer who has fallen between the cracks of generic publishing, and doesn't seem to come out from the commercial houses anymore. But several specialty presses (Corroboree, Morrigan, Manuscript, Drumm) successfully market a steady stream of Laffertiana.

East of Laughter seems to be one of his more recently written novels, and I suppose the typical reviewer's cop-out would be: "Typical Lafferty humor. Otherwise indescribable."

No, let me try to describe it. This is actually one of the more accessible Lafferty novels, in about the middle range of quality, sharing with several others the

idea of a small clique of people with funny names (Laughter-Lynn Casement, Hieronymous Talking-Crow) who rule the world or otherwise have an inside view of how things work.

This time, the Group of Twelve (for all there are 15) must take over when the Seven Scribbling Giants who write the world's history start turning up dead. The conventional plotting is rudimentary. Odd things happen. The characters explain from their own skewed (usually Catholic) viewpoints, while hopping around the world encountering even odder people and events.

Eventually, several of them become the new giants. A traitor is unmasked. The Laffertian world-order continues. There is much ado about Atrox Fabulinus, who figured in Lafferty's earlier almost-non-fiction *The Fall of Rome*. It's funny, wildly inventive, but lacking real humanity. The very best comedy touches the heart. Sometimes the best fantastic comedy (T.H. White's or Mervyn Wall's) is laced with tragedy and becomes deeply moving. But Lafferty is just funny and inventive. His characters remain caricatures who never truly come alive.



Rating:

Arabesques: More Tales of the Arabian Nights
Edited by Susan Shwartz
Avon, 1988

PAGE 18

258 pp., \$3.50

An almost entirely original anthology, which really does get to the roots of modern fantasy, or one root anyway. The authors include Gene Wolfe, Tanith Lee,

Galaxy MAGAZINE

THE DARK AND THE LIGHT YEARS

by David L. Rosheim

Harry Turtledove, Andre Norton, Jane Yolen, Esther Friesner, M.J. Engh, and others.

The stories fit into a framework written by Schwartz, but stand well on their own. Most are of quite high quality, although the Wolfe (a superb evocation of Ottoman-ruled Egypt) is flawed by terminal murkiness and Tanith Lee's plots-within-plots get so tangled she takes several pages explaining things away at the end.

But there is everything you would expect from the real (not kiddified) Arabian Nights: adventure, magic, intrigue, sex. Friesner's tale is the bawdiest. Turtledove's is the most historical (about that crucial moment in the early seventh century when Byzantium and Persia knocked each other prostrate, allowing the whole Muslim world to come into existence in the resultant political vacuum). Lee has flashes of great beauty. Recommended.

Rating:

Noted:

A Silverlock Companion
Edited by Fred Lerner
Niekas Publications, 1988
52 pp., \$7.95

Jan./Feb. 1989

A handsome guide to everything you ever wanted to know about the fantasy classic *Silverlock* and its author, John Myers Myers, including (of course) a glossary of the extensive literary allusions in that work, detailed bibliography, and even an autobiographical sketch by Myers. If you've read *Silverlock*, I need not say more.

Rating:

Galaxy Magazine, The Dark and Light Years

By David Rosheim

Advent, 1988

343 pp., \$15.00

A book-length history of one of the most important science fiction magazines, in the manner of the earlier Advent title, *A Requiem for Astounding*, but a much better job.

Where the *Astounding* volume consists of one fan drearily droning on about his favorite stories, with no sense of context or critical ability whatever, Rosheim does everything possible to provide context, inside information and anecdotes to relieve the issue-by-issue descriptions of stories. Recommended for any SF reference library.

Rating:



**How's
your
First Aid?**

American
Red Cross





FROM THE BOOKSHELF

By Janice M. Eisen

Lone Heroes

The Healer's War
By Elizabeth A. Scarborough
Foundation/Doubleday, 1988
320 pp., \$17.95

The Healer's War marks a major change of pace for Elizabeth A. Scarborough, who is known for her light fantasy. Based partly on Scarborough's expe-

watch her grow, and with her we learn about the country, its people, and herself. An ancient Vietnamese healer gives her an amulet, which, in addition to healing powers, conveys a deep understanding of others. The amulet becomes vital during the second part of the novel, when Kitty and a crippled young boy are shot down in the middle of the jungle. (I can't discuss this sequence without giving away too much of the plot.) Finally, at the end of the novel, we watch Kitty's attempts to readjust to civilian life.

While the fantasy element is vitally important — the plot couldn't be the same, and Kitty would die, without it — it is not truly the focus of the book. Particularly in the first section, it seems the book can't decide whether to be fantasy or mainstream, and the two sections don't mesh perfectly.

The main character is real and believable, and the other characters, even the minor ones, are also excellent. Scarborough's portrayal of the life of a woman in the military in Vietnam is fascinating, and, while I can't speak from personal knowledge, it all seems depressingly credible. *The Healer's War* is a fine addition to the genre's literature about Vietnam, and war in general.

Rating: $\star\star\star\star\frac{1}{2}$

Haunting Women
Edited by Alan Ryan

Avon, 1988
210 pp. in proof, \$3.95

I am, in general, not a fan of horror, so I approached this an-

thology of "chilling stories of horror by fourteen acclaimed women writers" with hesitation. However, these fascinating, frightening stories should appeal even to those who don't ordinarily read horror. Rather than ghouls and gore, these stories rely purely on psychological terror — the only supernatural element is an



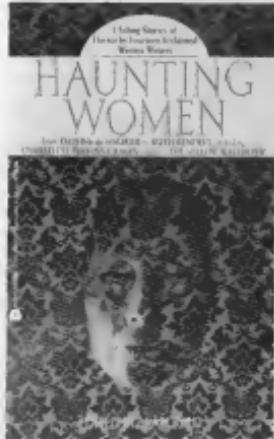
riences as a nurse in Vietnam, it is gritty and appalling, but in the end life-affirming.

Kitty McCulley is a young, inexperienced nurse who finds herself unexpectedly in Vietnam in the middle of the war. During the first part of the book, we

Rating System

**
*

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor



occasional ghost. The authors are adept at bringing our deepest fears to life.

The caliber of the stories Ryan has selected is impressive. He has, thank goodness, passed over Shirley Jackson's anthologized-to-death story "The Lottery" in favor of "The Renegade," which left me chilled. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a brilliant piece which deserves to be better known. Like many of the stories in the anthology, it has a

feminist twist, but the message is conveyed with subtlety. The final scene of Mary Danby's "Robbie" will linger in my head for a long time.

While I consider those three stories the best, there is not a single clinker in the book. Other authors included, many of whom will be unfamiliar to most readers, are May Sinclair, Muriel Spark, Ruth Rendell, Gertrude Atherton, Mrs. Henry Wood, Tanith Lee, Rosemary Timperley, Ellen Glasgow, Jean Rhys, Hortense Calisher, and Isak Dinesen.

Ryan's introductions to the stories are interesting, without being intrusive. Even if you don't own a single horror book, you should add this one to your



library.

Rating:

Terry's Universe
Edited by Beth Meacham
Tor, 1988
234 pp., \$16.95

The late Terry Carr — editor, writer, and fan, most noted for creating the Ace Specials — was much beloved in the science fiction field. A number of authors who knew and worked with him have donated stories to this memorial anthology, and all profits will go to his widow to pay off medical expenses. That's a good reason to buy it, but so is the fiction it contains. It's uneven, but it's all well worth reading.

PAGE 20

The anthology is full of experiments, not all of which work. The best story is Terry's own "The Dance of the Changer and the Three," a fascinating step into an alien viewpoint via the retelling of a legend. Kate Wilhelm's "Isosceles," about a love triangle, is terrific, though not SF. Also excellent is Carter Scholz's "Transients," about a nightmarish trip.

Kim Stanley Robinson's "Lunatics" is odd, a pseudo-scientific space opera plot written in a very modern style; it's interesting but not wholly successful. Fritz Leiber supplies a well-written and rather graphic Gray Mouser story. Robert Silverberg has an interesting tale of life among prehistoric humans.

R.A. Lafferty's story is strange, as might be expected, involving Gypsies and accurate predictions of the future. Roger Zelazny's story is a loony Damon Runyon pastiche. Ursula K. Le Guin gives us a haunting variant on the myth of Persephone. There are also stories by Michael Swanwick, Gene Wolfe, and Greg Benford.

You should buy and read this book, but with the understanding that not all the stories work — which ones may depend on your individual taste.

Rating:

Fire on the Mountain
By Terry Bisson
Arbor House/Morrow, 1988
167 pp., \$16.95

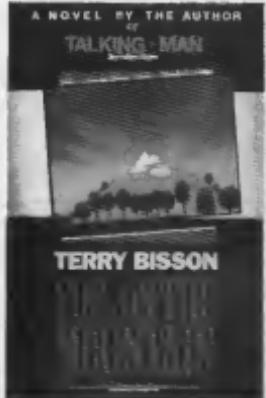
The Civil War was the single most significant historical event in shaping the modern United States, and for that reason it is a popular subject for alternate histories. Terry Bisson goes back to just before the Civil War, to John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. I won't go into all the details here, but the raid succeeds and sparks a slave revolt, eventually resulting in an independent, primarily black, socialist nation in the South called Nova Africa.

It is 1959 in this world, and Yasmin Odinga is bringing to a museum the memoirs of one of her ancestors, Dr. Abraham, who fought in Brown's army. The

novel alternates between 1859 and 1959, revealing both the alternate history and the modern world it created.

The 1859 section is excellent. You forget you're reading fiction instead of history, and the characters of Dr. Abraham as a boy and those he deals with are wonderfully drawn. The 1959 section is less successful. The characters are also well drawn, though the main character doesn't seem very likable.

The problem is that I just don't believe what's happened in the century since Brown's rebellion. For one thing, although my politics lean left, the socialist utopia was too much for me. We all live together in harmony in socialist paradises all over the



globe — c'mon. Just because people are revolutionary in one way doesn't mean they aren't reactionary in others; recall Eldridge Cleaver's (I believe) famous statement that women's place in the black movement was in bed.

Also, there's no justification for why such wonderful, clean high technology — beyond what exists in our 1988 — exists in their 1959. It would have been more interesting, and fairer, to see people try to create a utopia with 1959 technology, which causes pollution and all sorts of nasty stuff.

Fire on the Mountain would have been much more challenging and interesting had Bisson either created more believable

conditions or justified the situation better. But I still recommend the book for the characters, the quality of the writing, and the wonderful historical section.

Rating: $\star \star \star \frac{1}{2}$

To the Vanishing Point

By Alan Dean Foster
Warner, 1988
310 pp., \$15.95

Ever had a really disastrous vacation trip? Well, it was nothing compared to what happens to the Sonderbergs during their simple drive from California to Las Vegas. After picking up a strange hitchhiker, they find themselves going through Hell — literally — as well as some other

nothing but worry about the kids and get rescued. Even in a reality where people's hidden abilities are revealed, hers is just to be — a mother! The teen-age daughter also does nothing useful until the end, when she finally finds her purpose in the story. Why couldn't these female characters play a more active role?

If you can ignore this problem, though, you'll enjoy the novel. Foster has provided wonderfully detailed depictions of alternate realities. To the Vanishing Point is well paced and fun to read.

Rating: $\star \star \star \frac{1}{2}$

Naked Came the Robot

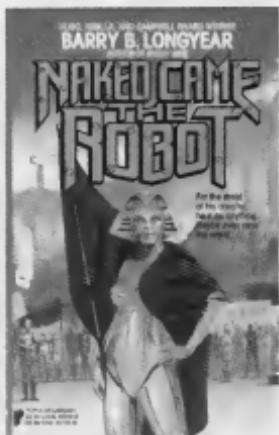
By Barry B. Longyear



unpleasant places, all in an effort to save the universe by untangling the reality lines.

To the Vanishing Point provides an enjoyable mixture of humor and terror which Foster keeps moving, and under control. The characters of the father and a crazy American Indian they acquire along the way are very well done, but the others remain less developed.

The book's sexism was frustrating to me, though. I don't demand that a novel be Politically Correct, but I got the same feeling I used to get as a child when reading the Bobbsey Twins: why don't the girls ever get to do anything? The mother does



Popular Library/Questar, 1988
214 pp., \$3.95

I'm not sure how to describe Barry Longyear's new novel, except that those expecting any similarity to "Enemy Mine" or the Circus World books will be quite surprised. Naked Came the Robot is sheer lunacy, sometimes inspired. It shares the free-associational, self-referential humor of Monty Python or The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. If you don't like those, you probably won't find this book funny; I do, and I did.

Henry Fleming has left the military, in which he, like most Americans in this future, grew

up, to enlist in the Economy. When he gets there, he discovers that it's not the world his recruiter painted for him. Soon he gets involved in a battle between striking and strike-breaking robots, from which he flees in terror, and he eventually becomes an important part of a plot to overthrow the government. A bare-bones plot description, however, cannot give you an impression of this book's amazing weirdness.

Longyear zaps a number of authors, most importantly Stephen Crane (*The Red Badge of Courage*), but also Lewis Carroll, H.G. Wells, L. Frank Baum, and Dante. He provides a bizarre concatenation of incidents which



somewhat manages to move the plot along to a mostly satisfying conclusion. I didn't understand the last paragraph of the book, but that may be obtuseness on my part.

As the book goes along there are increasing numbers of awful puns and shaggy dogs, but they never dominate. Naked Came the Robot is worth reading when you're in the mood to chuckle.

Rating: $\star \star \star \frac{1}{2}$

Trouble Is Their Business

Surfing Samurai Robots
By Mel Gilden
Lynx/Omega, 1988
246 pp., \$3.95

Mel Gilden has written a wonderfully funny book which is also an excellent Raymond Chandler pastiche. The book partakes a bit of the zaniness of *Hitchhiker's Guide*, but has a more cohesive plot. Gilden has Chandler's style down pat, and the mystery's solution and the ending of the book are also suitably Chandieresque.

The book is set in a slightly alternate universe, apparently taking place about now. The most important difference between our universe and this one is that robots were invented in 1965 and have reached a high level of sophistication, as demonstrated by the robots of the title, known as surfbots. (The "Samurai" ap-

match against a motorcycle gang which wants the yogurt recipe.)

The plot thickens, as it should, and gets even stranger. Nonetheless, the mystery is not hard to figure out, but the puzzle was never the main event of a Chandler mystery, and it isn't here. The book contains some hilarious moments, and even when it was not strictly comedy, my interest didn't flag. I greatly enjoyed *Surfing Samurai Robots*; I'm smiling just thinking about it. If you like humor, Chandler, surfing, or yogurt, you'll enjoy it too.

Rating: $\star\star\star\star$

The Long Orbit

By Mick Farren
Del Rey Books, 1988
304 pp., \$3.95

Coincidentally enough, the hero of *The Long Orbit* also wants to be Philip Marlowe, and in fact is living in that identity. Unlike *Surfing Samurai Robots*, Mick Farren's book is not a hard-boiled pastiche, though it starts off like one; it ends up being a suspense novel, and a pretty good one, set in an unusual future world.

This Marlowe lives in an overcrowded, depressing future in which most people cannot have jobs. Those who score well on a certain test may choose to "leisure out" — be sterilized, take their government payments, and live in their own fantasy world. Much to Marlowe's surprise, one day a woman with a genuine case walks into his office. The seemingly simple request that he find the woman's sister eventually involves him in a battle for power among the super-rich, and gives him a chance to travel and reveal much of this future to the reader.

Farren justifies Marlowe's "detective" identity well, and the culture as a whole is well drawn and believable. The action is fast, and I never knew what was coming next. The book suffers from too much lecturing exposition in the first chapter, which might discourage some readers — it should have been spread among several chapters to avoid the lump.

The book's main flaw is the

protagonist. Except at the end, Marlowe doesn't do anything, just gets dragged along from one place to another. That makes it harder to care about him — as he himself recognizes, he's a pawn, and his sudden transformation to savior at the end is not all that believable.

There are also smaller problems. There are numerous comments such as, "These guys are right out of the twentieth century" and "This isn't the twentieth century, you know." Even one of those is too many. Bringing in the Russians at the end and explaining the entire geopolitical situation seems gratuitous and unnecessary. The ending is unsatisfying — though Marlowe



pellation, by the way, is weakly justified; I have the impression that the title was invented first, and the book written around it.)

The residents of the planet T'toom (known as Toomlers) have begun picking up old radio broadcasts from Earth, which are enormously popular. Our hero, Zoot, becomes enamored of the character of Philip Marlowe, so he adopts the same last name and heads to Earth to be a private eye. He lands in the ocean off Malibu, where he is adopted by some surfers who manufacture hallucinogenic yogurt. Zoot must find out who is attempting to keep the surfers from winning their

wonders whether he'll like his old life anymore, as far as we know, everything will return to the way it was.

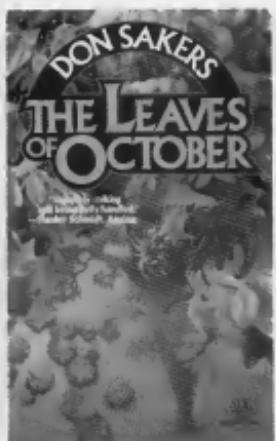
In sum, *The Long Orbit* is interesting and well conceived, with some great details, but some significant flaws as well. Possibly Farren intends a sequel — that would settle some of the loose ends.

Rating: $\star\star\star$

The Leaves of October

By Don Sakers
Baen, 1988
276 pp., \$2.95

Don Sakers's new book is not truly a novel, but a collection of



short stories. He has taken as his subject the cliché situation of aliens judging whether humans should be allowed to survive, but he handles it well in this intriguing, but sometimes annoying, book.

The Hlutr are sapient trees who manipulate the genes of races throughout the galaxy, and the stories are told from their viewpoint. When humans burst into space, the Hlutr must decide whether to allow them to live, and later events call for a repeat of that decision. The book spans millennia of the rise and fall of human empires.

The stories in the book are of varying quality. The first is the best — I'd recommend it strongly

They wage the ultimate battle between magic and evil



even to those who don't want to read the whole book — and the later ones are not as good. The further I read, the less I liked the book, though I was enchanted at the beginning.

Part of the problem is the carelessness of the way the individual stories have been welded together. Expository material is repeated over and over; it should have been edited out if this book is to pass as a novel. In addition, though Sakers handles the cliché well, the repetition of the alien judgment of humans in story after story gets to be a bit much.

Another problem is that the Hlutr, except for the protagonist

of the first story, are too alien to empathize with, and the humans are just foils. I also found the ending far too preachy and mystical.

The book does contain some striking ideas and beautiful writing. I would like to see Sakers write a real novel, which I'm certain would be superior to this poetic but flawed collection.

Rating: ★★½ □

The Eye in the Stone

By Allen L. Wold
Pageant, 1988
352 pp., \$3.95

Allen Wold's new fantasy novel takes place in another alternate universe. Most of the differences are minor, and amusing — for example, Detroit is the movie capital of the world — but the major difference is that magic exists. Magic users must keep their abilities secret, though, or risk being killed by those fearful of their power.

Morgan Scott, a sorcerer, comes to Harborbeach to visit his brother Michael, whom he hasn't seen in years. But Michael isn't there, and nobody seems to notice that he's missing, not his employee, nor his best friend, nor his girlfriend. Obviously, magic is afoot, and Morgan's search for Michael eventually leads him into a confrontation with the Servants of Evil and the demon they serve.

The book starts out well, but something's lacking at its core. It turns into a series of battles, and I had trouble maintaining interest. Morgan does so many stupid things that you want to wash your hands of him. His female sidekick should have been more active.

The book seems carelessly written: Wold leaves loose ends dangling, and he plants things that are never used. The ending is unsatisfying, with the final conflict resolved by a cheat. The novel moves along smoothly, with plenty of adventure, but I want something more from a book than a D&D game.

Rating: ★★ □

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The Cave Beneath the Falls

By Jonathan Lethem

Art by Lucy Synk

*Oh I'd live in Niagara forever! In a dark cave beneath
the falls*

I'd sit there the Mad Honeymooner

*Devising ways to break marriages, a scourge of big-
amy*

A saint of Divorce ... — Gregory Corso

Savory was waiting at the table when I got there. He was younger than he'd sounded on the phone, with sleek black hair brushed straight back over his skull, and a jaw that clenched and unclenched automatically under his cheek. He was wearing a pair of dark-rimmed glasses when the waitress pointed him out to me, but he had them off and pocketed away before I got to the table. When he rose to shake my hand — it was with the well-practiced firmness of a politician — he towered above me without quite unfolding his knees. It was only after the waitress brought me a single menu that I realized he'd already ordered for himself.

"I hope you're not in too much of a hurry, Mr. Savory. We've got a few things to go over."

"I understand," he said. He looked nervous. "Is this — private enough?"

"Is anyone following you, Mr. Savory? Does anyone have any reason to?"

"No. Of course not."

"Do you care if she knows?"

He looked at me with shock. It was a question that usually had that effect. "What do you mean?"

"You want out," I said. "You don't care anymore. You don't even care enough to break it off yourself. Do you really care if she knows? Think it over."

I knew only one other person who made a living the way I did. Her name was Maureen Kammerer, and she was the bitterest person I knew. We were two of a kind. The Pkills Maureen and I shared were commonplace ones: we could both jump bodies and project directive consciousness into a willing host. What made us unique was the way we chose to apply our talents. Our clients, like Mr. Savory, were people who wanted out, but didn't have what it took to face their husbands, wives, or lovers and do the dirty work themselves. On a good week I ended four or five relationships; my record was three in a day.

When I first got into the field I sought Maureen out, and we tried to formulate a comfortable relationship, concoct a "shop talk" for our profession. Soon I knew better, and avoided her like the plague. When I experienced the compulsion to drop in on Maureen I went and grimaced at myself in a mirror. It was a lot more direct.

Now Savory took a drink from his water glass and avoided meeting my eyes.

"Relax," I said. "This is a private arrangement. That's part of what I offer. But it's not illegal — it's not espionage, and we're not spies. The more naturally we can go about this the better. Try not to feel guilty."

His attention sharpened. "Are you mocking me?"

"I wouldn't dream of it. I want to make you comfortable. If you'd rather go to my office —"

"This is fine."

I ordered, and we made small talk until after the food arrived. Savory was uncomfortable, but that was nothing new to me. Eventually I worked the conversation around to what we euphemistically call "the loved one."

"Celeste Stanhunt," he said. "We've been seeing each other on and off for almost two years. I'm involved with someone else now. I want to make as clean a break as possible. No hard feelings."

I told him I understood. It was standard stuff.

"We've meant a lot to each other. I have great feelings for her. It just isn't possible to continue. I wanted it to work out —"

"Cut it out," I interrupted. "I don't need your help with the sentiment. Let's talk logistics."

"Excuse me?"

"Where and when, specifically. How many sessions. Letters, if any. Follow-up phone calls — can you handle them yourself? They're extra." I spent the rest of the evening walking him through a game plan. When the meal was over I learned another reason he'd ordered without me. Separate checks.

I suppose I was misanthropic. I'd never given it much thought. To me the emotions of my fellow human beings were just tokens in a professional transaction. I didn't take unnatural pleasure in my work. To the extent that I enjoyed it the enjoyment



was professional in nature: satisfaction at a job well done.

I wasn't sure I could say the same about Maureen. She never volunteered information about her past, and I sensed it would be a mistake to ask. I didn't even know how she got into the business. Possibly there was some specific event in her past, some irrevocable damage inflicted on a younger, more vulnerable Maureen Kammerer — but I think it's just as likely the effect was cumulative, that her bitterness crept up on her and inhabited her, the way she inhabited her clients. Who was I to talk? Maureen didn't call me any more often than I called her.

The next day Savory showed up at my office and we enacted the transfer. I made the jump, then put my emptied body into the office safe, took his body downstairs and hailed a cab. Celeste Stanhult lived up in the hills. I rifled through Savory's wallet: there was enough to keep the cabby waiting if I made the job a quick one. I had the driver drop me off a few blocks away so I could walk up to the house.

Savory's body, big as it was, was ill-acustomed to the exercise. I broke it into a bad-smelling sweat walking too quickly up the long driveway, and had to stop and breathe heavily for a few minutes before ringing the doorbell. The house was built into the hill, so that the first floor in front was the second in back; I could see a light on from the curve of the driveway that wasn't in evidence this close up. I was beginning to fidget impatiently when I heard the bolt of the lock slide open.

She opened the door and my heart fell into my stomach.

I don't remember if I'd formed a picture of Celeste in my mind based on Savory's descriptions. If I did it probably wasn't particularly favorable, based on Savory himself. It doesn't matter. Whatever expectations I carried with me up to the house were, in that instant, eradicated forever.

If you've never come face to face with your ideal, I feel sorry for you. I also envy you. Celeste Stanhult was my ideal. Until she opened that door I never knew I had one. After she opened it the meaning of the term became forever inextricable from the memory of the sight of her face.

She smiled. God help me. I looked at her through the eyes of her lover, and she smiled at me. I was an assassin's bullet falling in love with its unwitting target. Celeste Stanhult's eyes were green, and I fell into them, and swam.

I pulled free of her eyes, only to be hypnotized by the beat of a pulse at her throat. I closed my eyes and suddenly I could smell her, invasive orchid-woman floating pheromones into my heart. I took an involuntary step backwards and opened my eyes to see a hazy angel backlit in the doorway.

I was a professional. I knew better. Gathering my resources I pushed past her, into the house, daubed at Savory's sweaty nose with the sleeve of his shirt, and put myself into the first chair I could find. I fought panic. What was happening didn't happen, couldn't happen. I was going to make sure it didn't. This would be the quickest job on record, by necessity.

It's superficial, I told myself. You won't like her voice. She'll squawk.

Celeste stepped back into the room, and moved around to a position behind me. Good, I thought. Stay out of sight. And then she draped her arms around my neck from above.

"You're sweating," she said.

I almost jumped out of her grasp. *Don't touch the bastard*, I thought jealously, even as the flesh I inhabited melted under her touch.

"Do you want something to drink?" Her voice was a solo played against the strings of my heart.

"Yes," I managed. I was struck dumb. Her arms slid away, and she moved into the kitchen. I loosened Savory's tie and pinched at the bridge of his nose, desperate for mental clarity.

"You sounded terrible when you called," she said from the kitchen. "Do we need to talk? You've seemed nervous lately —"

She was doing my work for me, creating an opening. In another case it would have been too good to be true. Even here it spoke, through the fog, to my dim sense of professionalism.

"Actually, I agree," I said as firmly as I could. "I don't feel right. I didn't realize you noticed."

"Of course I noticed. How could you think I wouldn't notice?"

Nothing's the matter, I wanted to say. *Kiss me*. I got to my feet and stepped over to the picture window.

"We can't just go on not talking," she said. I was surprised at the insistence. It occurred to me to wonder whether she wanted to leave Savory at the same time he wanted to leave her.

She was behind me again. I don't think she touched me first, but I could feel the heat of her body like an imprint along my back. I was suddenly overwhelmed by what was within my grasp. It only took a moment of weakness: I turned around and in one motion had her in my arms. Savory's body dwarfed hers. She folded her arms against my chest; I cradled her skull in my palms and slid my tongue into her mouth.

The kiss, though I'll remember it forever, was short and messy. She broke away and looked guiltily at the floor. My hands dropped back down to my sides as if they were coated in lead.

"Something's wrong," she said.

"Celeste —"

"You say my name as if it were strange to you."

I ran past her, and out of the house.

I unlocked the safe and moved back into my own body, then called downstairs and ordered coffee sent up before bringing Savory out of his trance. Outside the sun was setting.

"It's an unusual case," I explained to Savory when I thought he was ready.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I need more time." I forced myself to look him in the eye. "I don't want to leave loose ends. I'll need another session. This happens sometimes — there's no additional fee. I'm a perfectionist, Mr. Savory."

He sipped his coffee. "Okay. You're the expert. I'll leave it up to you. When do you want —"

"Call her and make an appointment for tomorrow

night," I said. "And then come in with the body. That'll be the end of it."

"No more Celeste?"

"No more Celeste," I assured him, swallowing hard.

I hurried him out, then went and sat down at the bar underneath the Saint George Hotel. When I stood up again a couple of hours were gone. I found a cab and heard myself reciting Maureen Kammerer's address. The cabbie had to help me up the steps.

Maureen was in her robe, her hair twisted into a towel. She looked somehow smaller and more vulnerable than I'd ever seen her before. "Why are you here?" she asked coldly. "I was going to sleep." Then I guess she read my eyes. "You look like shit. Come in."

We sat at her kitchen table and she listened while I spilled the story out whole. It took a while. As my head cleared I began to notice a change in Maureen. My revelation was having some effect on her; she set her jaw, and it dawned on me that she might somehow have suffered once under a similar curse. But she didn't mention it, and I didn't ask. When I finished she got up and turned her back to me to light a cigarette.

The silence was burdened. "Would you go into the other room?" she said finally. "Lie down if you like. I'll be in."

I went and did exactly as she suggested, stretching myself out on the couch. After a few minutes Maureen appeared, changed into a set of silk pajamas, her hair loose. I sat up. She moved onto the couch beside me and, out of nowhere, gripped my thigh with her hand.

"Mark," she said, her mouth close to my ear. "Listen to what I have to say. I want you to take me and make love to me. I'm the one who understands you. We're alike, Mark. We both know too much." She brushed her lips against my cheek. I felt a chill go up my spine. "Trust me I know what you need."

I pulled away, numbed. It was Celeste Stanhant I wanted, not Maureen. Not familiar, horrible Maureen. Like making love to the grimace in the mirror.

"Maureen." I touched the top of her head. "This is ridiculous. This wrong. We — we aren't like this."

"We could be," she started.

"No." I thought of Celeste. I might never have her, but she still represented another kind of life, a possibility of something clean, not dirty and Pskilled, like Maureen. Like myself.

I moved away on the couch, drawing my knee up between us. "No," I said again. "I'm sorry, Maureen."

She stared at me, her eyes round with anger. I sensed the sudden return of the other Maureen, the Maureen who brimmed and bristled with bottled-up pain. I sensed it enough to shrink back a little on the couch, but not enough to avoid the swing of her hand. The slap caught me open-mouthed, and Maureen smashed her knuckles on my teeth.

"Ow, shit," she said. "Get out of my house. Go away. Go back to Celeste. Go tell her you love her."

"I need a cab."

"I'll call it. Wait downstairs. Bastard."

The next day I went back up to the house in the hills, in my own body this time. Celeste's car was still in the garage. I rang the bell without giving myself a chance to equivocate, and stood blinking in the sunlight while I waited for her to come to the door. When she did she examined me quizzically, and held the door partly open with half her body behind it.

"Yes?"

I introduced myself, stumblingly, as an associate of Savory's. Her beauty still managed to clot my tongue in my mouth.

She let me in, and stood hovering in the kitchen entrance while I sat down in the same chair as before. Why couldn't she come and put her arms around me now? Why wasn't it that simple?

"I'll get right to the point, Ms. Stanhant. I have reason to believe William is carrying on an affair behind your back —"

"I don't understand. What do you —"

"I'm here because I don't want to see you hurt. I'm something of an admirer of yours — from afar —"

"What makes you think I'm interested in hearing this?"

Her voice was cutting. I felt awkward and small, and in the wrong body.

"I'm a friend, Celeste. Please —"

"How do you know me?"

"That's not important. The point is I do know you. I don't know how to say this — I love you. I want to suggest myself in Savory's place. He's such a brutal son of a bitch. I'm — you'll have to trust me, Celeste." Maureen's words spilled out of me despite myself.

"You'd better leave," she said, her face was etched with confusion.

I wasn't her lover now. I was a stranger. The effect was devastating. I was madly in love with the Celeste Stanhant of the night before; the gentle, mildly troubled lover of William Savory. She was different now. My own presence transformed the object of my affection to the point of unrecognizability.

I wanted to kiss her, but I couldn't — not now, not with these lips. I wouldn't stand a chance with her until after I broke her away from Savory — if I would ever have a chance with her at all.

"I'm sorry," I said as I left. "You'll understand soon."

She stared at me in bafflement from within the entrance to the kitchen.

Five hours later I was back on the doorstep, as arranged in advance, in Savory's body. My own body was back in the safe in my office, drunk out of its skin. I'd barely been able to make the transfer. And, while I should have left the drunkenness behind with my body in the safe, I still perceived my surroundings, as well as the complicated landscape of my emotions, through a gauze of stupor.

The change in Celeste was astonishing. Her eyes that afternoon had been opaque, unknowable and unfeeling — now they were once again open, shimmering pools for me to lose myself in. We stood staring for a minute in the doorway before I went in behind her. Neither of us said anything. The atmosphere was charged. It was as if we were in total and instant



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communion with the deepest portion of each other's psyche — an innermost place where the desire to couple and the desire to separate were mingled and at peace. I was struck with the sense that she understood these two confused intentions in me and was eager to satisfy them both.

The lights were low in the apartment. Celeste led me through to her bedroom, reached behind me to close the door, and then suddenly lay her weight against me, applying herself like a full-length decal, finding points of pressure and sensitivity everywhere; thigh meeting thigh, hipbone against hipbone, her breasts tucking into my ribcage, her mouth nuzzling my throat. I trembled, but only for a moment, and then let my own weight — Savory's weight — fall to meet hers.

It was another hour before the first word was spoken. Celeste lay curled against me, knee across my stomach, mouth against my ear. My heart was still pounding unnaturally, and I could see even in the dim light of the bedroom that my chest was flushed red.

"You see," she said. "It's just like I told you."

"What?"

Her tongue flicked at my lobe as she spoke. "I know who you are, Mark."

Every muscle in my body tensed.

"It was inevitable that we'd come together, Mark. Don't you see? We're the parallel lines that eventually meet. Even if it had to be like this."

"I don't—"

"It's Maureen, Mark. You don't have to pretend anymore. You're with Maureen. I hired on to help Celeste Stanhun leave Savory two nights ago—"

I bolted away from her. "What are you saying? How did you—" I moved out of the bed, dragging a sheet with me.

"It's me you're in love with," she stated, as if it were obvious. "It was me that first night."

"And this afternoon?" I demanded. I wasn't sure which answer I preferred.

"What afternoon?"

"Today," I said through my teeth. "I came up here today—"

"No," she said. "If she didn't know you were coming she couldn't have scheduled me to take over the body."

I fell back into a chair, the sheet covering my body. My mind was reeling in confusion as I attempted to sort out the permutations. "You didn't know — that first night — you didn't know. You were kissing Savory, not me."

"And you were kissing Celeste."

"But —" I struggled to pin down my objection. "But you — you weren't attracted to Savory. It wasn't anything special to you. I was falling in love with Celeste — but you were just —"

Her face hardened. "Don't judge me. Don't you dare judge me."

I swallowed hard. "You make love through your clients all the time, don't you?"

She didn't answer me. It was an answer.

"No," I said. "No, this is crazy. This is wrong in too many ways to even contemplate. You're sick —"

"Don't."

"Don't what? I don't have any choice. Leave me alone, Maureen." I got up, dressed Savory's body, and without looking back, went into the living room.

I heard her get out of the bed, and turned to see her, the glorious body still naked, face stained with tears, as she slammed the door to the bedroom shut. I suppose something was triggered in my intuition in that moment, but if it was I didn't know how to act on it. Instead I went to the kitchen counter where her purse was lying and dug in it for her car keys. I didn't think Maureen was going to be able to drive the body back and make the exchange on her own. I was right.

"I'm all alone," came her voice through the door. "I thought you would understand." Her voice was incredulous, and choked with sobs.

I went and put my ear to the door. "You bastard," she gasped. It was followed by a little clicking sound which I mistook for her hand on the knob. Then came the blast. Then a sliding sound, and then a clatter as, I suppose, her grip loosened and the gun fell to the floor. I don't know for sure because I didn't open the door myself, and I didn't stick around to see it opened.

*** * ***

I'm still looking for a lawyer willing to defend me in court against Savory's lawsuit. Both women are gone, of course, killed in the one suicide. The Celeste Stanhun personality — which I never really knew — died quiescent with the body, never knowing what happened. It took a week for them to break into the safe in Maureen's office. By that time the life-support had failed, and the body had begun to decompose. I hear her eyes were open.

I realize I'm an incredible bastard, but I still can't help wishing she'd killed herself in the Maureen Kammerer body. It doesn't seem too much to ask. She could have killed one person that way — instead of three.

In Great Silence, Listening

By David Lunde

*Now that we're all grown up
and the gods have gone away,
in our loneliness we turn
our ears to the sky
at Arecibo, at Gorky,
a Very Large Array
in our desert of silence,
and we listen
we train our machines to listen,
eavesdropping eagerly
on the smalltalk of stars
hoping that somewhere
in our benighted cosmos
there speaks a wiser voice.*



EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

Year Three

Welcome to the third year of *Aboriginal/Science Fiction*.

Most of the so-called experts predicted we wouldn't finish the first year. Then they said we certainly wouldn't last through the second.

So what you hold in your hands proves once again that, when experts are 100 percent certain of something, they are often wrong.

Mind you, it hasn't been easy. We didn't start with the backing of a big publisher, or any publisher for that matter — just a dyspeptic creature of doubtful sanity. We didn't have a ton of money. We did have a ton of determination and effort.

Talking about tons, we got a ton of letters in response to our question about changing the name of the magazine. (The letter carrier's still angry about that.) We'll try to get as many as we can into this issue, but it seems an almost impossible task. Of course, we're used to those.

We have also been working hard to keep improving *Aboriginal*. In upcoming issues, we have scheduled two short stories by Larry Niven set in the alternate universe made famous by his book, *The Magic Goes Away*. And we have a two-part essay from David Brin that examines the difference between science and magic and their relationship to science fiction and fantasy.

We are also working on getting stories from a number of other big-name writers. This does not mean that we have forgotten our commitment to find new writers. That's still high on our list of priorities, but we thought we'd spice up the action a bit.

Our success so far doesn't mean we are out of the woods yet, or that it's time to say "we told you so" to anyone, because we are still under-funded and operating on a shoestring. And we still face an uphill battle against inertia and all those who think things should always be done the same old way. It's kind of odd that you find that in a field dedicated to the future, but you do, even though we are steadily making converts.

One of the problems we face is

that most people take magazines for granted and assume a great deal about how they operate, particularly when it comes to price.

For instance, we recently received a letter from a subscriber who complained, in a nice way, that our magazine is too expensive. Our single-copy price of \$3 and subscription rate of \$14 for six issues was too high, he said.

We readily admit that our prices are higher than those of our competitors. But, aside from the covers, our competition is printed on newsprint — the cheapest paper available. Our paper and printing costs are much higher per copy than theirs.

That isn't intended as a criticism. The publishers of the digests keep their production costs as low as they can because they have to contend with the same artificial perceptions that we do on the part of the buying public.

The public, you see, thinks magazines are supposed to be inexpensive.

Even though they're not.

Why?

Well, you can subscribe to *Newsweek* for about 50 cents a copy because it gets most of its money from advertising and because it is attempting to overtake *Time*, which has a higher circulation and — you guessed it — gets more ads.

Both *Time* and *Newsweek* also have circulations in the millions, which makes their per-copy printing cost pretty low.

On the other hand, the biggest science fiction magazine, *Analog*, sells about 100,000 copies.

While *Analog* usually has 10 to 20 paid ads, they are generally SF related or specialty ads. It doesn't have any of the slick national advertising you find in *Time*, *Newsweek* or other mainstream magazines. That national advertising lets them keep their cover price low.

What should a magazine be priced at?

Fiction magazines such as ours and others in the field really should be priced in keeping with other forms of

entertainment.

The late Robert A. Heinlein used to say he was writing books that essentially competed with the cost of a six-pack. So what does a six-pack of beer cost? Four to six dollars in most neighborhoods.

What does it cost to see a movie? Unless you go to the bargain-basement matinee, you pay \$4 to \$6 for two hours of celluloid entertainment, suggesting there are a lot of organizations competing for that six-pack money.

More and more paperback books now cost \$4 or more.

Aside from its entertainment value, the price of a magazine should also be based, in part, on what it costs to produce it.

Locus has several times estimated that it costs about 17 cents a copy just to print digest-sized magazines like *Analog*. It costs three times as much per copy to print *Aboriginal* at our current circulation level.

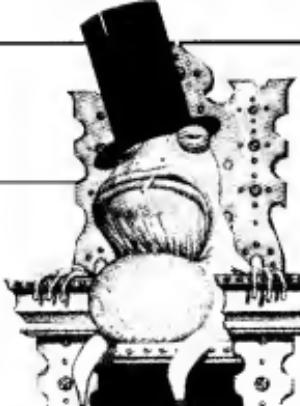
Suppose we were to print 100,000 copies of an 80-page *Aboriginal* and put them on the newsstands on a bimonthly basis. And suppose we had a modest full-time staff of six. An editor, assistant editor, ad manager, ad sales person, circulation director and secretary at \$20,000 a year each. (For now, don't worry about the fact that they'd probably be eligible for food stamps at \$20,000 a year.) Printing is about \$46,000. Other costs, like salaries, color separations, shipping, short stories and art, rent and a few others, add up to another \$33,000.

All in all, it would cost about \$79,000 to put out one issue of the magazine. We wouldn't do it quite that way, of course, but the numbers are realistic.

Suppose we sold 40,000 of those 100,000 copies. (That's about the percentage that *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* sells — of a smaller press run — and it has one of the best sell-through percentages in the field. It also happens to be close to

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A Message From Our Alien Publisher



It's Testable

With this report, I enclose all the patents taken out by human beings in the United States since 1961. I would like to call your attention to number 4,666,425, which was issued in May, 1987. Most of the human beings who read this report in Ryan's science fiction magazine will not believe in the existence of patent number 4,666,425, but this report isn't intended for human beings, and I really don't care what they believe.

Titled *Device for Perfusing an Animal Head*, this patent describes machinery for keeping alive a head severed from its body. The patent owner, a man named Chet Fleming, has not actually built this machinery (certain peculiarities in the U.S. patent laws allow people to patent things that do not exist), but he claims it can be created with available technology. Your first question, I know, is *why would he ever want to?*

You must look at human science, for it is strange in the extreme.

On the surface, their science is about what you would expect from an arboreal, binocular species with a kinesthetic orientation. They care very little for essences, still less for the reality of universal consciousness. This I attribute to their underdeveloped olfactory sense. They use something called the "scientific method," which is similar to our formulation of essences, only more complicated.

As in so much of human activity, the scientific method is excessively complicated in order to compensate for their nature. Like the formulation of essences,

it starts with (1) stating a problem, and it goes on to (2) forming a hypothesis to explain the solution to the problem. That's where the similarity ends, however. After thus solving the problem, the human scientist then adds (3) experimentation or other data gathering, (4) interpretation of the research data, and (5) revising existing theories based on the results.

These last three steps may seem bizarre and wasteful, but not if you know the human beings. Yes, there is a certain similarity with us in the way they derive their scientific truths: dreams, inspirations, magnificent guesses, creative genius. We, of course, take an inspiration from a creative thinker and turn it over to the essentializers to be worked out and refined, and the essentializers then deduce from the inspiration the scientific truth and file it for use by our species. There are few creative thinkers in human science, however. Most of them are drones, engaged, not in finding the answers to problems, but in testing other people's answers (and in testing other people's tests).

Human society will not pay a person for creating original explanations of things, only for destroying existing explanations, so the scientist is forced to seek a living by offering to test (read "disprove") hypotheses, his own and those of other scientists. Although there are virtually no resources devoted to the support of inspiration, there are plenty of funds available for experimentation. These funds finance the scientific research establishment, with its schools, research

centers, laboratories, grants, tenure, publications, students, fellowships, and conferences — virtually all devoted to disproving explanations of natural phenomena.

It is characteristic of these creatures that they think the significant part of science consists of disproving hypotheses through experimentation. Science, you see, is a competitive activity. And it is a big business. Nothing like rock music, but big business nevertheless. The National Science Foundation alone has an annual budget the same size as that of the state of Montana. It uses this money, naturally, to support people primarily engaged in tearing down hypotheses.

And the National Science Foundation is just one small part of the research establishment. Human beings channel untold millions of dollars into the devising of experiments to upset hypotheses. These experiments are devised according to a particular code requiring, among other things, that an experiment be reproducible. This is so other scientists can check up on the people who are checking up on the hypotheses. You might think it is strange that human beings devote so much of their scarce resources to checking up on each other, but I don't. I know these creatures. They cheat.

Last year saw the announcement of both a national conference and a journal devoted to ensuring the integrity of sci-

(Continued to page 48)

Hana and his Synapses

By Greg Cox

Art by David R. Deitrick

"Orange cocaine," I joked. He believed me. That's when I started to worry.

A line of spilled Tang dusted the violet tabletop between us. He snorted some, and I watched his face as the former drink of former space programs went to work, painfully lowering the pH of his nasal passages. Tears leaked from his nervous brown eyes. A mini-shriek whistled through pursed lips.

Ten minutes later, he regained the ability to speak: "Wow! Great stuff. Not as good as this green coke I tried in Lisbon once, but definitely nirvana for the nose."

Uh-huh. Right.

Not much to look at, this one. Little guy. Dry, badly dyed hair, balding at the top. Fidgeted like a hacker going through terminal withdrawal.

"What's that on your nose?"

"Freckles? Oh, you mean the glasses. These are what used to be called spectacles. Antique optical lenses, that is, as opposed to Ben-Hur. I'm basically myopic, you see. In a strictly sensory sense."

I almost regretted asking. "Why not augment your orbs, or replace them?"

"Putting circuits in my eyes?" A shiver worked its way down his spine. "Not that I'm phobic, mind you, but I don't go in for that sort of thing. I mean, how do you read the instructions when something goes wrong?"

From the look of him, he had no augments at all. Hard to believe. Who let this embryo out after dark, let alone into Purple Rows?

The grape-colored boxes here locked from the inside. You could order drinks and, if you were really famished, pre-zapped ramen, but the main item on the menu was privacy. It's a place for hustlers, dealers, and people like me.

"Sure you're not lost, spectacle?"

"Er, I don't think so. You're a hassler, right?"

Take a close look, I thought. Who else but a professional troublefinder would wear black buckskin slacks along with a bandoleer full of tomahawks? I was a walking business card, lacking only the name....

"Tiger Lily."

"Seriously?"

I stood up to give him a better view of my midriff. A chromium buzz saw whirred where my belly button used to be. An implanted pizza pan protected my own

innards from the blade's jagged edges. Nothing shielded the wise guy but air.

"New body," I said. "New name. Any questions?"

"Yes, is that for making salad, or do you moonlight as a paper mill? Probably a personal question. Forget I asked. It's very impressive, though. You can slow dance and perform appendectomies at the same time."

If I didn't get his name and business soon, I was going to take out more than an appendix. Maybe he figured this out.

"My name's Hana. Jimmy Hana. I work downtown at Manhattan Mentech, a noble institution wherein science and surgery join together, at affordable prices, to alleviate the heartache of stingy chromosomes. Your basic fits-and-chips shop. We just handle standard augments, though; no buzz saws. Actually, I don't handle them at all. I work at the front terminal, processing inventories, client records, credit checks ... you know, the vital data without which bio-enhancement would be a hobby instead of an industry. I keep on top of things too, which is why I noticed."

God save us from dramatic pauses. "Noticed what?"

"Gray matter is disappearing, and I don't know where!"

Sounded autobiographical to me, but then again I barely knew him. "Explain."

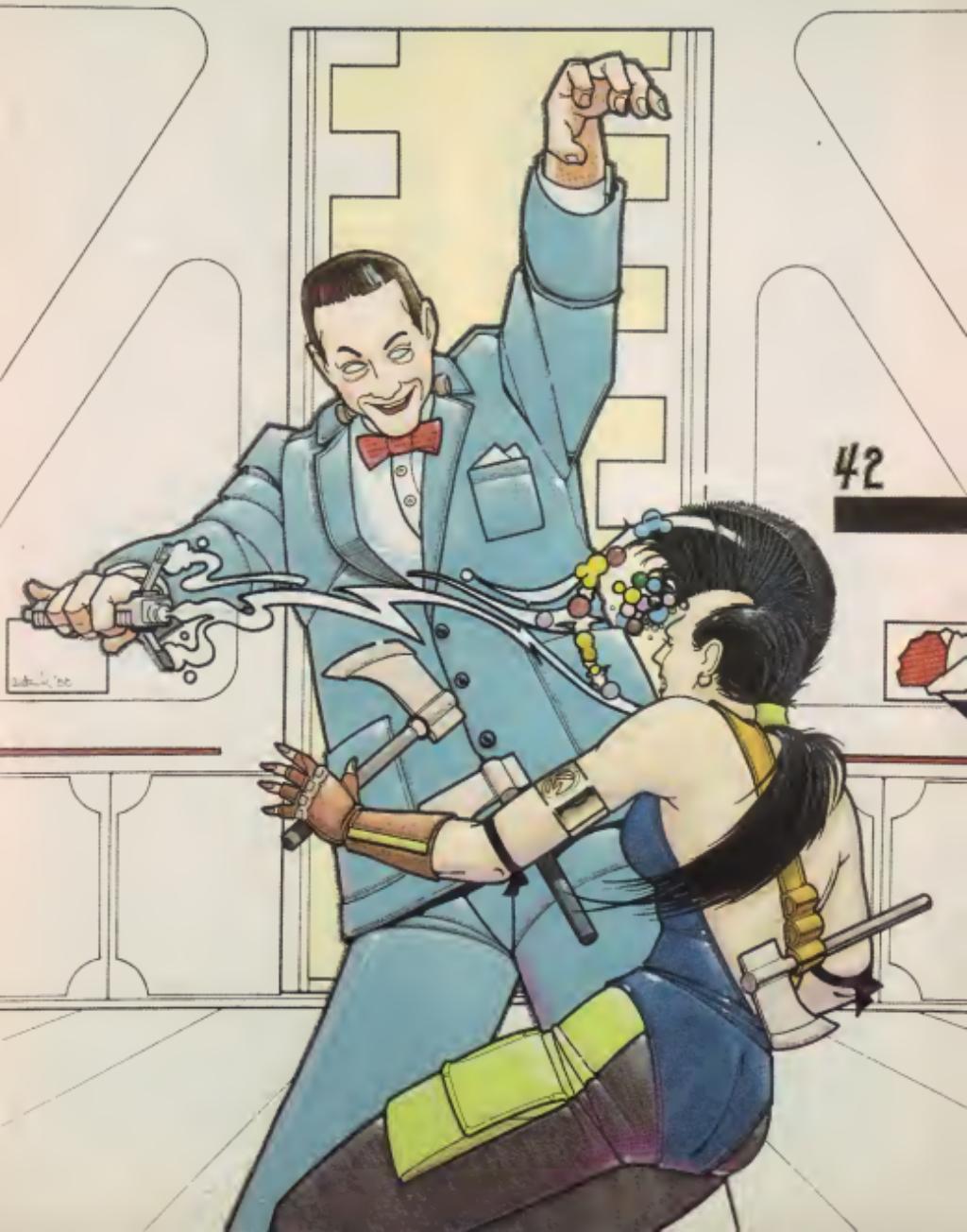
"Well, it's like this: whenever a chip gets planted in someone's head, a little natural brainstuff has to be removed to make room; otherwise, some of our regulars would end up with skulls the size of refrigerators. Bad news if you're sitting behind them in a theater. Anyway, what happens to the gray cells that get evicted? I've pored over every file in the system and I can't find out."

"Maybe they're just dumped."

Hana shook his head. "There are still laws governing the disposal of human tissue; just last week a guy got busted for trying to recycle his in-laws. He's insisting they don't count as human...."

"Beyond that, though, the information isn't just missing, it's hidden! Every time I go hunting at my keyboard, the screen ends up telling me SEE: STARDUST MEMORY, but nobody at work knows what STARDUST is. Except my supervisor probably, and

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try getting a straight answer from her."

"Uncooperative?"

"You could say that. Rose does not speak; she exhorts. Her idea of dialogue is a corporate pep talk delivered to a captive audience, preferably bound and gagged."

Whatever. Hana was as tightly focused as a radio turned to six stations at once, but there might be a payoff stuck inside the babble. STARDUST MEMORY, eh? Someone was being cryptic, which implied they had something to hide, which meant that someone was running a scam I didn't know about. That's just what a good troublefinder likes to hear. Nothing's more lucrative than an uncovered secret. One way or another.

"Okay," I said. "You're onto something and you're out of your league. That's where I come in. I'll handle the hassles. We'll both get some answers. Understand?"

"Absolutely. You don't know how this has been preying on my mind. I mean, who knows what sort of diabolical conspiracy, what unnatural perversion of technology, has been paying my salary? Last night I had this terrible dream. Black-market brain cells were being implanted in senile pit bulls...."

I tuned him out. I ordered extra ramen. Why not? It had been a profitable evening. Already I had a project, and a plan.

If only I had a different partner.

Manhattan Mentech was located on the top floor of a ten-story building at the corner of Broadway and Zelig. The only elevator was an express with just three lighted characters visible over the inside door: 1 - 10. The trip through the hyphen didn't take very long.

Hana sat behind a Formica counter at the other end of the lobby. The sound-proofed wall behind him failed to block out entirely the sound of drills and lasers. I saw a few other customers browsing through catalogs filled with bright graphics. To my left, stenciled lettering labeled the office of "Dani Rose, Supervisor."

I took a number and sat down on a vinyl couch. Hana looked in every other direction he could think of. He started to whistle. Sweet sushi, I thought, this was going to be worse than I expected....

The infamous Rose emerged from her cubicle just as my number was called. One look suggested that my new partner might be a decent judge of character. Rose had a designer labcoat, coiled red hair, a sitcom-sweet smile, and eyes like an underfed D.A. She reminded me of a sadistic nursery-school teacher I'd scalped as a kid.

Hana sweated as I approached. Rose's surveillance didn't help any. I wondered if it was too late to slip him some tranquilizers.

"Hello," he said. "You must be new in town. I certainly haven't laid eyes on anyone like you before."

Rose raised an eyebrow.

"I'm here for a Turner circuit," I said quickly, handing Hana a fistful of his own currency. "One that can colorize my dreams."

"Certainly, Tiger Lil... I mean, whoever... excuse me, what did you say your name was again?"

So much for pretending to be strangers. There was only one way to salvage this mess. I grabbed Hana by the lapel of his jacket and yanked him halfway across the counter.

"What's up, pussycat?" I cooed. "Don't tell me you've forgotten last night already? You shy little thing!"

I gave him a showy, attention-getting kiss. Afterwards, he blushed convincingly enough. "Oh, you! I'm sorry. I didn't recognize you with your Mohawk on."

The things I have to do to maintain a cover...!

A printer made spitting noises beneath the counter. "Here's your receipt and prescription," he said. "Just go through the swinging door to your right. Don't be afraid to ask for free samples."

I blew him a kiss and got out of there fast. Rose tracked me with her eyes the whole way.

The cutting room was all padded cots and commotion. Body mechanics pushed rolling carts of surgical gear past row after row of reclining customers. The brown-red floor had been carefully colored to conceal bloodstains.

A medman showed me to a cot. He handed me an anesthetic pad, then made me sign a consent form and liability waiver. I pretended to read them both carefully; it gave me a few more minutes to scope out the place before I got put under.

Looked routine enough, if a bit hectic. Must be the busy season, I guessed; everyone's cashing in their Christmas gift certificates for new parts. I spotted motion detectors on the walls, and huge boxes of fresh equipment — sponges, scalpels, and such — sitting unopened in a corner. Nobody had time to put them away, apparently. Interesting.

Then I saw what I was really scanning for: a medwoman with some gray on her hands. She sealed about a half-ounce of brain in a ziploc bag and headed for the back of the floor. I risked a peek over my shoulder to see where she was going.

A metal door. Frost-covered. A freezer probably... and Holy Thunderbird, look what's standing guard!

The biggest peewee I'd ever seen. Seven feet tall. Close to three hundred pounds. Most peewees are only two-fifty. He had the look, though: slicked-back hair, rouged cheeks, the obligatory blue suit and cherry-red bow tie. Same on the outside, same on the inside. I knew already he'd be sexless, mean, and easy to boss. The ultimate, genetically bred hybrid of teacher's pet and thug.

Something was definitely up. Why would Mentech waste a peewee on biological trash? I had only a few minutes to wonder, then the medman's pad sent me deep into REM-state.

At first, my dreams were black-and-white...

Cardboard and packing popcorn all around us. We crouched in darkness, impersonating scalpels. Hana was close enough to speak in my ear without budging.

"This is ridiculous. It's 9:30 already! Even the janitors have gone home by now. They're snugly plugged into a cassette somewhere, not playing house in a box like us devil-may-care types. Every one of my limbs is asleep, so what does that make me? A quadrasonniac? Human beings were never meant to

travel by Federal Express...."

He talked too much — no, thought too much about things that didn't matter. Disorganized. Inefficient. Bananas. Still, the world outside sounded as depopulated as Hana claimed. I listened carefully, but heard only the muted nocturnal murmuring of furnaces and setting girders. I switched on my belly saw and shimmied through the wall of the box. Styrofoam pellets clung to my skin and slacks.

"Stay there," I ordered. "Don't move." Hana groaned, but kept inside the cardboard. No guards around, as near as I could see, but why excite the motion detectors?

The cutting room was near black; my tigerish orbs got a good workout. Moving carefully, I skirted the invisible boundaries of the sonic detectors until I reached the main company clock. Let's hear it for systemic user-friendliness. By just resetting one timer, I put the whole operation on Tiger Lily Savings Time. As far as the detectors were concerned, business hours had arrived.

With any luck, we'd be out of here before someone noticed the lights.

I signaled Hana and he clambered out of the box. "I don't believe I'm doing this, breaking and entering into my place of employment. I mean, I've stolen paper clips before but...."

"We haven't broken anything," I interrupted. "You search Rose's office. I'll check out the freezer."

"But what if we don't find anything?"

Black electronic filaments striped the golden fur of my Mohawk. A strong, persistent signal coursed across my forebrain. "My cells are here," I said.

Two days, and they hadn't gone anywhere. I could tell. A sour-tasting memory coated my tongue. Radiodase. The stuff burns like hell going down, and you don't want to know how I flushed it out again, but it served its purpose. My old gray matter had an aura you could track with a Geiger counter — or a sensitive, stylized antenna. Kind of a shame, really; I was ready to trail my lost brain bits to the deepest hole in the city. Turns out I didn't have to.

Cold air from the freezer. I stepped inside and inhaled a frosty puzzle. The freezer was empty. Nothing there but scuffed-up metal slats on the floor and a snow-caked thermometer just inside door. I squinted at the mercury: 25 below. Cold, but not cold enough to actually keep human tissue fresh. I knew camouflage when I felt it.

The signal kept coming, hot particles streaming from somewhere nearby. If I were a lump of raw neurons, where would I be? Before any options introduced themselves, a shadow dropped across the slats in front of me. Too large to be Hana's. Well, well.

I pivoted. The sight of the peewee gave me a rush, not just because of the threat. A 24-hour guard ... freakin' teriyaki! Mentrech wasn't taking any chances with whatever they had here. My tornahawks were already in my hands. Smirking, peewee fiddled with a hand-sized portable remote.

Rainbows lunged for my face, knocking me off-balance. Ganglia rape, that's what it was. Bits of last night's dreams, stray memories, and fragmentary glimpses of freezer walls ricocheted throughout my

skull. I felt myself lurch sideways. My bare shoulder collided with cold metal, slid down toward the floor. Neon splatters, blindingly bright, were tossed against the surface of my eyes. Filthy sneaks! They booby-trapped my color controls....

Frostbite and fluorescence battered my nervous system. I couldn't stand up. The freezer floor tasted like snow and bad beef. Vaguely, I registered peewee grabbing me by the throat. He had green skin. Pink eyes. I switched on my belly saw, but he spun me around. I slammed face-first into a wall. The saw screeched against the frozen metal. Steel versus steel.

I threw myself backwards, right into peewee's punch. A Day-Glo fist cut open one side of my jaw. Ivory-colored blood, streaked with aquamarine, ran down my chest. This is it, I thought. I'm going down. Peewee came at me from behind a fountain of prismatic sparks.

Zap! I heard a loud electrical discharge. Peewee froze, turned black, then dropped to the floor. For a second I saw Hana crouching beside him, but my eyes went crazy again and psychedelic pinwheels cart-wheeled across my field of vision. A heartbeat passed. I went blind.

"Hang on," Hana said. He sounded nearby. "I'll figure out these knobs in a moment. It can't be trickier than my VCR remote, though of course all my tapes tend to run backwards.... You should see the rain jump off Gene Kelly!"

The blank screen behind my eyelids came to life. Hana changed from a fuzzy, black-and-white shadow to a real person. I stared at the polished chrome lightning gun in his hand. Silver trim. Gray trigger. The colors seemed right to me. Whew!

I took the remote and tucked it carefully under my belt. "Thanks, partner. These spooks are playing for keeps. Glad you were, too."

"Well, actually...."

The peewee started to snore. I took another look at Hana's gun. A sleeper? I didn't think those were even manufactured anymore. No market.

Hana tried to look tough. "It's not like I have any problems with killing people. He who lives by the sword dies by the nuclear grenade launcher. Life's too cheap to worry about wasting a few meaningless specimens of humanity, unless of course they're members of your immediate family, cult, or local civic organization...."

"It's a matter of taste, not morals. Violence tends to be both excessive and aesthetically unpleasing, not to mention hard to clean up after. Gratuitous sex, on the other hand, deserves a much closer look. With mirrors...."

I never think about sex while working. "Did you check out Rose's office?"

"Naturally. Take a look at this." Hana handed me a fresh looking disk, security sealed. The label had been prepared on a felt-tip typewriter. STARDUST MEMORY: CONFIDENTIAL.

Right away, I felt better. I still didn't know where the missing gray matter was, except that it was somewhere close by, but maybe this disk would clear away most of the static. Tox-sucking peewee! He and his prefrontal assault had cost us too much time. The

sooner we hijacked an elevator out of here, the better. Gleaming brown eyes behind the specs. "What now? What's next?"

"That's easy," I said. "Take the floppy and run." ***

Whoever started this cutesy fad of naming buildings like people had a lot to answer for, or so I decided as Hana guided me towards his apartment in a clean, secure condo-mall. Chiseled "birth certificates" insulted my IQ at every intersection. Gary Lounge. John Salon. Annie Hall.

Hana lived on the second floor of a roomstack named Tony. He gave the lock permission to let us both in. I got the impression it didn't like me.

The room was like Hana's mind: cluttered, chaotic and bizarre. A poster of Humphrey Bogart — two-dimensional, no less — hung on the door's inner face. Einstein looked down from the ceiling. There was paper everywhere; it was like stepping inside a desk. Papers on the tiles. Papers on the futon. Stacks of papers piled high next to the printer. Rows of old books were crowded together on three walls' worth of shelves. What would he do, I wondered, if he had to clear out in a hurry?

I scanned the few titles: *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Groucho and Me*, *Getting Even*. "Why the wordage?"

"Tell you the truth, this is all I could find! Believe it or not, people used to spend a lot of time reading. There was more written in a single month than any one person could digest. We're talking classic stuff here: poetry, philosophy, movie novelizations. You've probably never even heard of Camus or Bloom County."

Sound deadly to me, like drugs or stim. I imagined a voracious, randomizing program that sucked up vital time and concentration, reduced them to pieces, and then scattered them so widely they could never be retrieved. A tense-making thought. Nowadays you have to stay lean, move fast, cut deep. Hana was too top-heavy to survive.

And I was getting just as fuzzy as he was.

"Switch on your terminal," I snapped. "Let's see what's on this disk." Breaking the security seal took less than five minutes. The first time through the file I almost didn't take it all in. "Play it again, Han." The second pass confirmed my first reading. "She's making a big brain over there, out of all the leftover tissue."

"A Super-Brain," Hana said. "The biggest concentration of pure mindstuff ever accumulated on this planet. Thousands of pounds of the finest organic circuitry ever produced by Mother Nature and public television. Think of the implications! This thing could have the power and depth to explain the human condition once and for all. Being and the universe. Love and death. Everything we always wanted to know about the cosmos but were afraid to ask...."

"Look pretty good on Rose's resume, I'll bet."

"That's probably just what she's thinking."

I heard mourning bells in his voice but couldn't guess why. We were tapped into a firewire here; the only question was how to make it pay. Ambition fueled my hormones. I tossed off the bandoleer and set my blade spinning. Fresh futures poured from brain into

body, mixing with the thrills of the recent past. I kicked away from the terminal, stood up, and stretched Hana's air conditioning blew against my skin.

Enough planning. Time to work off some energy. I grabbed my partner and pushed him down onto the futon. Paper crackled beneath his back, my knees.

Hana's eyes searched the apartment. "I could have sworn we were alone," he whispered. I watched his Adam's apple bob. "Who are we fooling now?"

"Nobody."

His tee-shirt came apart easily enough. "Er, Tiger Lily, I realize that burglary makes strange bedfellows, and God knows I've felt the attraction between us, ever since you first cast lustful feline eyes upon me in Purple Rows..."

Squirming squids, didn't he ever stop talking?

"...without a doubt the sexiest cybercrook I've ever been pinned by; still, there's just one little thing..."

Bright plastic briefs beneath his trousers. Navy blue, with gold foil banding and a tiny little portrait of Dr. Ruth.

"...going to bed with a buzz saw is not exactly safe sex..."

Well, here was a surprise! Hana had plenty of augmentation after all; it was just all in one place. Talk about conspicuous overcompensation. My little data-entry clerk was equipped with rainbow stripes, bioluminescence, stainless steel, buzzers, batteries, radar, and a stickshift. I played with the temperature and flavor controls. Everything appeared in working order.

"Oh...gasp...about the saw...."

"Just wait until you've had the Norelco Treatment," I promised. The terminal screen threw an orange glow upon the scene, never flickering once, while sirens rose and fell outside in the streets beyond the mall. Slowly and with care, I gave Hana the closest shave he'd ever gotten, all over.

Later, in the early a.m., I decided that his specialized augments had been a good investment. "Quality technicraft," I commented, as the rotors cooled and his batteries recharged. "State-of-the-art."

"Thanks. You don't think that the accessories are too flashy? I can't masturbate or else the neighbors report a nuclear war. The local kids send me dirty pictures every Fourth of July ... hey, what's so funny?"

It was all his fault. If he hadn't been so goddamn silly, I wouldn't have broken down like that, indulged in pure ha-ha's for the first time in years, and let us get caught so badly offguard. As it was, neither of us spotted Supervisor Dani Rose until she suddenly loomed at the foot of the futon with a tomahawk in one hand and Hana's silver gun in the other. "Okay, you two," she said. "You've had your last shtrupper. I want to get this mess cleaned up."

"Rose!" Hana blurted. "Where did you ... how long?"

"Your address and personal passwords are recorded in your employee file, naturally, along with every time you tried to access STARDUST MEMO-



RY." She shook her head sadly, just like my late nursery school teacher. "I'm very disappointed in you, Jimmy. I thought maybe you were management material. If your personal conscience, though, is more important to you than our work, then I'm afraid that your future is over."

The problem with belly saws is that they don't have much range, not compared to a hatchet or gun. Rose stayed a safe distance away. She stood between me and rest of my gear. "This is a safe-living zone," I said. "A murderer's going to attract lots of attention."

Rose glanced at the weapons, both Hana's and mine. "Not when you appear to kill each other," she said, "in some sort of unpleasant sexual falling-out. A sordid episode, but not without educational value. You can expect a long article in the company newspaper, Jimmy. Worker Breaks Conduct Rules, Comes To Bad End, something like that."

She raised her arm and hurled the hatchet at Hana. I sprung off the futon, but the gun was faster. I felt the beam hit me right below the throat. There was shock, a quick burst of hot/cold, then the numbness spread through me, taking everything away.

Nobody uses sleepers anymore. Except my partner, and Rose didn't know that. I woke up quietly, without movement, to find myself lying beside Hana. What's that on your nose, I asked him stupidly, then realized it was one of my own tomahawks buried deep between his eyes. Funny, fuzzy-minded little clown. How come you didn't know enough to stay alive? Then again, if you had, I wouldn't still be around.

Thanks.

I heard paper rustling, and a keyboard being switched off. Rose was making a clean sweep, I guessed, vacuuming this apartment free of every last trace of STARDUST. I risked a peek. Rose's back was toward me. She was sorting through a long, folded document next to the printer. Good, I thought. Don't go away. Sneaky as fine print, silent as plutonium, I eased myself across the floor and rose up behind her. Went for her spine first, then her scalp.

Eventually I searched her wallet.

With Rose's ID, I had no trouble getting back into Mentrech. Five a.m. The place was still hours away from opening. I noticed that someone had turned the lights back off. Rose? Pee-wee? I was ready for the big sissy this time. My skull was wrapped in an insulated ski-mask, Mohawk and all. The shielding would block off the signal from my discarded ganglia, as well as pee-wee's remote, but that didn't matter anymore. I knew where the lost gray matter was.

The elevator expressed me to the tenth floor. Pee-wee was lounging in the lobby. Perfect. I was fighting a bad mood and every little convenience helped. I had the sleeper with me. I didn't use it. This thug owed me some colors....

Ashen white.

Black and blue.

Red.

The finished product blended neatly with the cutting room floor. I left him there and pulled the freezer door closed behind me. As I suspected, the buttons

were hidden behind a pack of phony snow, just above eye-level. Three buttons: 1,~ 10. I pressed the middle one and rode the freezer down into the hyphen.

There was a non-express elevator, sure, but no floors between two and ten. Only STARDUST MEMORY. The world's largest brain.

I stepped out of the freezer into the center of it. The air was a whole lot warmer. STARDUST was alive and well and in no danger of decay. Funny, it didn't look anything like what I expected. When you think "brain," a certain specific shape comes to mind: squash-like, with divided hemispheres, prefrontal lobes, and so on. I had imagined something similar on a Godzilla-sized scale. I was way off base.

Most brains are shaped by the bone around them. STARDUST, however, had a skyscraper for a skull.

Four high walls of wired gray. Row after row of rectangular post-office boxes stuffed full of molded brainstuff, separated by thin walls of clear plastic film. Transient sparks jumped from box to box like messenger fireflies. Craning my neck back to see the top, I spotted several rows of empty boxes, waiting to be packed with human neurons. Rose's grand project wasn't finished yet, but it was already too big to be believed.

A microphone was set up on a stand in the middle of the floor. "Hello?" I said into its head. A wail of feedback drove me backwards.

Something answered me. It spoke amplified English with an electronic accent. "Tiger Lily, I presume."

How did it know that? I looked, unsuccessfully, for hidden cameras. Was STARDUST telepathic, or did my former brain cells just recognize my voice?

"Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain," it continued. "Sorry, wrong bedtime story. That's an interesting alias you've chosen; I guess you've Barrie'd your past in more ways than one. Frankly, I've never figured out what Peter saw in Wendy, except maybe that she ran around in a nightgown all the time. Your namesake always seemed more exotic...."

There was something familiar about this thing. Not the voice, but the style. "So you're STARDUST MEMORY, eh? What can you do?"

"About what? Or do you mean what should I do? So many answers, so many more questions. It's not easy being semi-omniscient, you know. There's no way to avoid the Big Issues and every little piece of my mentality wants to get in on the debate. You ever read Whitman? 'I am large, I contain multitudes.' Awe-inspiring, yes, but how do you get them to shut up, let alone agree on the proper definition of 'gnarly'? My analyst says I have a Collective Collective Unconscious, so he charges me group rates. The pope takes my confession by phone, but we can't decide who's more infallible. Nothing human is alien to me. I possess all knowledge, all faiths, I am Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Communist. Several of my components used to worship Shirley MacLaine."

Suddenly, I felt very tired. Was this what my partner had died for? I was appalled, of course, and yet... somehow it seemed as if Hana had never gone away at all. I couldn't stop listening.

"I've considered taking over the world, but I think I'm slightly overqualified. It's like Groucho Marx said once, sort of: 'I wouldn't want to rule any species that would accept me as their ruler.' You ever seen any of those movies? *Horse Feathers* is my favorite, though *Duck Soup* is probably the best. No harp solos.

"There's an artificial intelligence on Alpha Centauri that's been communicating with me. Silicon chips, but a great conversationalist. I don't think we're going to work out, though; even at the speed of light, the foreplay is likely to take centuries. Besides, she says I remind her of her brother.

"So, you got any strong feelings about purely intellectual relationships?"

After a while, I gave STARDUST my phone number and went back to Purple Rows. Tomorrow I'm going to have the rest of my gray matter taken out, or else have a whole human brain put in. I haven't made up my mind yet.

Aliens



Our next issue:

In the next issue of *Aboriginal*, our publisher will be joined by a motley crew of aliens. The alien activity ranges from those who preside over the end in "In the Shadow of Bones" by Robert A. Metzger (a major change of pace for our gonzo-SF writer), to a Regency chaperone of sorts in B. W. Clough's "The Indecorous Rescue of Clarinda Merwin." Plus we'll have the first part of Hugo-winning author David Brin's essay on "Science and the Fantastic."

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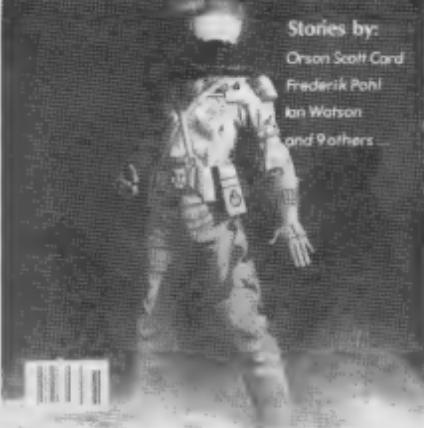
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Pat Morrissey

Miriam

(Continued from page 6)

room is the hum of the touch-screen and the click of his tiny keyboard. "Miriam Benson."

"Yes."

He shakes his head. "I have no record of her."

"No record?" What did I do, that she has gone to this length to avoid me? Didn't she realize that I was injured, that I couldn't help myself? "Can I see?"

He steps next to me. He smells faintly of cat box. I long for a cigarette. He works the computer deftly, a thousand combinations, and each reading "No Such Person" when he is through.

I have no choice. I have to thank him and leave. He doesn't deserve my anger. Miriam does. Miriam and those doctors who help her hide from me.

I storm into the shrink's office and the receptionist takes a step back. She is a mousy woman with brown hair and big eyes, and she has been scared of me since I first saw the shrink. I think anyone who isn't normal scares her. Sometimes I wonder if she is a former patient, if the shrink didn't pretend to take pity on her and hire her so that he could observe her fears.

"Where is he?" I ask.

"He's in session." Even her voice is timid. I push past her and shove open his office door. A man sits in the rocking chair, his head lolled back and his tightly clenched hands shaking in his lap. The shrink sits behind the desk. His mouth narrows when he sees me.

"You'll have to wait, Ben."

"I'm not going to wait."

The shrink excuses himself, gets up and grabs me by the arm. The man in the rocking chair doesn't even seem to notice. The shrink hauls me into another office, next to his.

"Is this an emergency, Ben?" His tone is caring, but his eyes are dark with anger. He hates to be interrupted, hates to be out of control.

"Where are you hiding Miriam?"

"We've been through this, Ben."

I hate that tone. Patronizing, patronizing. "I've been to her job." He is going to ask me where that is. I can hear the question before it leaves his lips. "You know, at the Greater Portland Info Center."

"Oh?" Interest finally lights in his eyes. "Did you see her?"

"Of course not. They say she doesn't work there."

"She doesn't," the shrink says. "Did you see Beth?"

"No," I say. "Some guy. He says Miriam never worked for them."

"She never did."

"That's not true!" I hate it when he lies. "I remember it. I remember it as clearly as I remembered everything else."

The shrink leans against the overstuffed bookcase. "What will you do with Miriam when you find her?" he asks. For the first time, the question sounds serious, as if he believes I will find her.

"I don't know." The answer slips out, out of my control. "Sometimes I think I'll kill her."

"You're angry at her for abandoning you, for not understanding. But did you ever think how hard it must have been to keep you around? You couldn't do anything for yourself —"

"But I'm back to normal now!" His words place tears in my eyes, tears that threaten the anger.

"No, you're not. You're angry. We do this with everyone who goes through the operation, Ben. They all come out angry and unpredictable, but only toward the people they love. We have to protect them and their families until they get well. Getting over the anger is the first step, Ben."

"I want to find Miriam," I say.

He looks at me tiredly. "You never will."

Sometimes I dream about children. Little boy children, babies, really, whizzing when I try to change their diapers. A woman laughs in the background, but it isn't Miriam. I want it to be Miriam, so I wish the dream away and see her, naked, laughing, as I order groceries. But outside the door, little boys knock, and I won't let them in.

I must have gotten close, because someone is following me. All the time. Steps matching my steps, rhythm matching my rhythm. A man in the morning, a woman in the afternoon, another man at night. They all follow me to protect Miriam.

The shrink tells me they spend this much money on everyone who gets the operation. I got it because I was some famous political hoo-ha, someone important. I probably met Miriam that way, even though I don't remember it. Me and Miriam in the Greater Portland Information Center. I wonder why I went to see her.

I haven't gone back. I haven't even gone near Burnside. I have been practicing losing my tails. It gets easier. Duck into an alley here, take an elevator one floor then use the stairs, catch a light rail and get off a block later only to catch a cab. If I practice too much, they'll catch on. But I'm not going to practice too much. I'm going to go to the Greater Portland Information Center, wait until closing and follow Miriam home.

I lose them in the middle of the afternoon, drop a few false leads and hide out until the Info Center closes. Then I watch from a sheltered rail stop as people leave the building. Some disappear onto a lower level, only to emerge later with kids. Day care. I guess I didn't remember that because Miriam and I never had children.

Finally I see her, striding out the door, long hair flying, a grin on her small face. She stops to talk to a man, laughs and walks away.

I start after her. I want to touch her, see what she says, how she treats me. Maybe then I won't be angry any more. Maybe then I can start healing.

Suddenly someone launches into me. I nearly fall. Miriam hurries on ahead. I try to shake myself free, but a little boy clings to my leg.

"Daddy," he says.

I search frantically for his parents, someone to get this kid off me. "Sorry, son," I say. Miriam has

stopped at the corner. "I'm not your dad."

He grabs tighter, pulling at the skin on my thigh. "Benjamin!"

I jump. I haven't heard that tone since my mother, decades ago. A woman stands a few feet away. She is holding the hand of another boy. They both look frightened.

"Benjamin," she says again, softly, and I realize she is talking to the kid hanging on me.

"He thinks I'm his father," I say. Miriam is crossing the street.

"I know," the woman says. She looks vaguely familiar. But the silver shouldn't streak her hair and the worry lines shouldn't mark her face. She lets go of the other boy's hand and kneels beside me. "How are you?" she asks as she pries the child's fingers from my leg, as if she has a right to my answer.

"In a hurry," I say. The boy lets go, and I start running again. Miriam has turned on a side street. I have to elbow people aside to reach her. Finally I grab her, and the anger returns as my fingers grip that slender arm. I push her forward and she stumbles. Her scream echoes down the street. The voice sounds strange. She turns —

— and her eyes are too narrowly placed, her nose too big. It isn't Miriam again. I step back. The woman across the street is watching me. She has pressed her youngest son's face against her leg so that he can't see. The other boy is staring, the light glinting on his tears. "I'm sorry," I say.

From the corner of my eye, I see one of the followers. He surveys the scene, then comes and stands beside me. He wants to take me to the shrink. I let him.

"What are we going to do with you, Ben?" the shrink asks. That tone again, patronizing, patronizing. "You can't keep looking for Miriam. You're a danger to other people on the street."

"I'm going to find her," I say.

The shrink sets some papers aside and puts his pocket computer on top of them. "Did you recognize anyone else there?" he asks too casually.

"Am I supposed to?" I don't tell him about the woman and the boys. It is too weird.

"Did you see Beth?"

"Who is this Beth you keep talking about?" I want to leave. I am tired of being questioned, tired of being poked and prodded and investigated. I just want to find Miriam and get well.

The shrink rubs the bridge of his nose and sighs. "Ben," he says, and I can tell that he is making a pronouncement. "Miriam doesn't exist."

That is a new one. Creative, I'll have to give him that. "Then how come I remember her?"

"Because we created her in your mind. To protect your family." He looks at me and his expression is blank. He is a good liar. "But now it's time to let her go."

Miriam laughs, her long legs tucked under her. We have made love all night and are ordering groceries so that we can make love some more. Only two memories, but two are enough.

"I'm going to find her." I reach for a cigarette,

but my pocket is empty. The room smells of cheese Danish and for the first time since I've met him, the shrink looks sad.



We're running out of back issues

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THROUGH THE LENS

By Susan Ellison

'Did You Know?'

A mark of those who are obsessed by films and television is that they can name virtually every bit player, obscure scenarist, or anecdote about the cinematographer in every film they've ever seen. They transcend mere fanaticism in their adoration of the art form and in their encyclopedic knowledge of the same.

But even among the most knowledgeable — particularly in the genre of sf films and television — Bill Warren, author of *Keep Watching The Skies!* (volumes 1 and 2), is the pinnacle of amazement. He knows all, has seen all, and bubbles over with joy to tell all. I interviewed him for you. Stay and marvel!

Bill Warren is the Hollywood correspondent for the top-rated French tv series *Fantasy*. He has edited scripts for films, advised directors and writers, and was for ten years the principal researcher for the Hollywood Film Archive. Along with his piece de resistance, *Keep Watching The Skies!*, he has written several short stories and has contributed numerous articles to magazines, including *Fangoria*, *Cinefantastique*, *Amazing Stories*, *Twilight Zone* and *Starlog*.

Here, now, are some fascinating Bill Warren insights into several sf movie classics.

Forbidden Planet (1956)

Everyone knows that *Forbidden Planet*, starring Walter Pidgeon, Leslie Nielsen, Anne Francis, and Robby the Robot, was modelled on Shakespeare's

The Tempest. What people may not know is that *Forbidden Planet* was an unfinished film when it was released, and is still an unfinished film today.

What happened was, the print had reached the next-to-last stage in editing when MGM decided to



Forbidden Planet's
Robby the Robot

have a sneak preview. One of the things that had been causing some difficulty with Dore Schary, the studio head, was the electronic musical score by Louis and Bebe Barron. The problem was that Schary thought the film required a conventional score, not the beeps and bumbles of an elec-

tronic score, so he decided to test the score in a local theater. During the sneak preview, a sound man sat in the theater mixing the score while the film was running. The audience's response was so overwhelming that it was decided to ship the film the following day. When the editor of the film, Ferris Webster, heard about it, he tried to persuade Schary to allow him to add some close-ups and fine tune the editing, but the film was shipped the next day. One of the scenes where a close-up is obviously needed is where Jack Kelly warns Anne Francis that Leslie Nielsen is a notorious "space wolf." She replies, "Yes, I could see the fire in his glance when he looked at me." Only he doesn't look at her in that shot. The close-up is missing.

But, despite the lack of editing, *Forbidden Planet* has enough power in its story, effects, and design that nobody seems to care.

The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (1953)

The *Beast* in this movie was a prehistoric rhedosaurus, freed during a nuclear test at the Arctic Circle. The job of bringing the dinosaur to life was done by Ray Harryhausen, who had literally been a lifelong friend of Ray Bradbury. When the film was completed (it was originally to be called *The Monster from Beneath the Sea*), Harryhausen invited Bradbury over to see it. When the film finished, Bradbury asked when he was going to be paid. Harryhausen was astonished, until Bradbury pointed out that the

film was an adaptation of his story (published in *The Saturday Evening Post*), "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms," even including the scene where the monster attacks a lighthouse. The result was that Bradbury was paid for the use of his story and the film's title was changed to *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. (The story was later reprinted as "The Foghorn" in *The Golden Apples of the Sun*.) And that was how Ray Bradbury made his motion picture advent.

Macabre (1958)

William Castle was regarded only as a competent director (although he did produce a great picture, *Rosemary's Baby*) until he made *Macabre*. What turned *Macabre* from an ordinary horror film into an almost overnight success was Castle's idea of resurrecting something that had been done before without any fanfare. He insured everyone with Lloyds of London while they were watching the film, in case they died of fright. People flocked to the movie. This persuaded Castle that gimmicks were the way to go.

(Note: Nobody ever did collect on his life insurance policy.)

House on Haunted Hill (1959)

Castle's next gimmick was for *House on Haunted Hill*. At the end of the film, Carol Ohmart is sure she has killed her husband, Vincent Price, by tossing him into an acid bath they happen to have in the basement of the house. (God knows why they have an acid bath, but there it is.) Not so. The skeleton of Price rises out of the acid bath and starts to chase her around the room. At this point, in certain selected theaters, a door opened at the side of the screen and a giant luminous skeleton drifted out into the audience. If you watch the movie, there is a long sequence where the camera pans around an empty room; during that scene the skeleton was supposed to come out. Castle called this one-time gimmick "Emergo," and, again

it turned a mediocre horror film into a hit.

The Tingler (1959)

The most famous gimmick Castle invented, and which he used for *The Tingler*, was "Percepto." In that rather incredible story, Vincent Price (Dr. William Chapin) discovers that fear is a living organism (it looks like a cross between a cockroach and a centipede) which grows on the spine of a terrified person. When it gets big enough, it crushes the spine of its victim unless he or she screams (the reason being, the vibrations of the scream cause it to shrink back to its normal mi-



Patricia Breslin
is worried in
Homicidal

croscopic size).

Chapin captures the Tingler (which tries to kill him) when Martha, the deaf-mute owner of a silent movie theater, dies of fear because she can't scream. In the climax of the film, the Tingler gets loose in the silent movie theater, now owned by the husband (who was the one who scared Martha to death). In the theater, as the audience watched the film, Vincent Price's voice was heard saying, "Scream! Scream for your very lives! The Tingler is loose in this theater!" Well, every tenth seat in the downstairs part of the theater had been wired with a little motor and, when the buttons in the control room were pressed, they sent a buzzing sen-

sation across the theater. Apparently, this was a most effective gimmick; it had people leaping out of their seats all over the place.

I understand that in one theater they had everything set up for *The Tingler*, which was to open the next day. The last day of *The Nun's Story* was playing when a bored projectionist tried out the buzzers on an audience of little old ladies, causing pandemonium.

Later on, the story was that Castle had wired the seats so that they gave an electric shock (after a while he even believed the story himself), but that's preposterous. All the people who experienced the thrill of "Percepto" agreed they were just little motors.

Homicidal (1961)

After a while, Castle moved away from gimmicks that had to be installed in theaters. In the movie *Homicidal* (a knock-off of *Psycho*), the heroine goes into the house where the dreaded killer is hiding. At that moment, a voice said, "If this is too terrifying for you, follow the yellow streak to the coward's corner and your money will be sneerfully refunded." Everyone thought this was a great gimmick until it was discovered that people would buy a ticket for the first showing and sit through both the first and second showings, until the announcement, then get out and get their admission back.

If you've enjoyed these behind-the-scenes anecdotes and would like another dose of "Did You Know?" then drop me a line c/o *Aboriginal SF*. Bill has a thousand and one more stories up his sleeve.

Do you know what the Batcave, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Night of the Blood Beast* have in common? We do. □



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aborigines

By Laurel Lucas

Authenticity

The character of Bugface O'Leary in the tongue-in-cheek "Three If by Norton," by **Ralph Roberts**, takes his Harley-Davidson very seriously.

The story's illustrator and our cover artist this issue, **Cortney Skinner**, took his assignment to portray a biker in colonial America just as seriously.

Skinner, you see, happens to have a fascination with that period in history, and, as a hobby, likes to portray



Cortney Skinner

an 18th-century itinerant artist.

Skinner asked two friends whose hobby is portraying Redcoats to lend him period dress that was accurate down to the pattern of the buttons.

He says it would have been "just as easy if I had made the stuff up, but I would have known better." So would a lot of his friends.

For the Harley, Skinner got some help from the assistant sales manager at the Harley Freedom Center in Billerica, Massachusetts. Jerry Williams provided details about the XLH Sportster 883 and became the model for Bugface.

For the other illustration, Skinner visited Deacon Clarke's house where John Adams and John Hancock had waited that night. Skinner says he got a fairly good likeness of Hancock, and copied the original furniture.



Ralph Roberts

wallpaper and shutters.

Skinner says he, "always wanted to do history paintings, to portray different periods and evoke the feelings of the time. Here's one time that I had the chance."

The author of "Three If By Norton," **Ralph Roberts**, is a writer with 13 books to his credit, five of them written just this year.

They range from *Auction Action*, a book about how to recognize and bid on antiques without getting ripped off, to a price guide for autographs, which was a collaboration with autograph dealer George Sanders.

Roberts tells me a handwritten letter by Isaac Asimov goes for \$96, Elvis's autograph is worth \$110, and the most valuable autograph by a living person is Greta Garbo's, worth \$1,000.

Roberts's latest project is a book on computer viruses. *Compute!'s Computer Viruses* is due out in November from ABC Books, and its aim is to help people protect their computer systems from the nasty bugs.

Roberts is a North Carolina native who fought in Vietnam, worked for NASA during the Apollo program, and estimates he's written about 2,000

articles.

"Although 60 to 70 percent of what I write is not science fiction, I consider myself a science fiction writer," he says.

Kristine K. Rusch, who brought us the memorable "Sing" (Feb.-March 1987) and "Solo for Concert Grand" (Jan.-Feb. 1988), has written "Looking for Miriam," a sad and creepy story about a man obsessed with finding one woman.

Rusch writes that the story came out of her work as a receptionist for a forensic psychologist. "The head injury patients, who wear vestiges of their old intelligences like a tattered mink coat, have always touched me in ways that other patients never do," she says.

Rusch has just finished *Acting Alone*, a horror novel set on the Oregon coast, and has started a contemporary fantasy called *Prisms*. She is also trying to write a short story a week.



Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Her story "Stained Black" was in *Amazing Stories* in November, and she recently sold the novelette "Phantom" to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

She is also the editor of *Pulphouse: The Hardback Magazine*, published by Dean Wesley Smith. "The magazine is fun; I am learning a lot about writing by reading and

editing," she says.

"Looking for Miriam" is illustrated by **Pat Morrissey**.

Morrissey was just back from the Worldcon in New Orleans when I spoke to her and she says she was "inspired by the great art at Worldcon" to do some work on "two paintings that have been in my head for months."

Morrissey splits her time between doing art for planetarium shows and working on art she can display at conventions.



Pat Morrissey

She is working on a project for the Baltimore Planetarium that includes a panorama of Stonehenge, and she was about to help brainstorm a script for a new show for the Hartford Planetarium called "Monsters in Space," to be narrated by Vincent Price.

Morrissey was the cover artist for our last issue, and in this issue she pitches a doubleheader with illustrations for Rusch's story and **Resa Nelson's** "The Next Step."

Nelson writes a sweet little tale about the human side of accelerating medical technology.



Resa Nelson

This is Nelson's first professional sale, outside of small presses. She

dedicates the story to Elizabeth A. Lynn and the class of Clarion 1985.

Nelson wrote the story at Clarion, and Lynn critiqued it and "gave me a lot of encouragement when I needed it most," she says.

Nelson recently sold a fantasy/horror story called "Sara and the Slime Creature" to the *Women of Darkness 2* anthology. She's now working on her first novel, which she is "really excited about."

In her day job she is a receptionist for a Fortune 500 company.

"The Cave Beneath the Falls" by **Jonathan Lethem** is a story about professional relationship killers.

This is Lethem's first professional sale.

The 24-year-old Berkeley, California, resident has already written his first novel, called *Apes in the Plan*, and is working on his second novel, called *Conflict of Disinterest*.

Lethem says he has no formal training as a writer, but when he was 14, he wrote a 125-page novel about a balloon trip around Mars.

He is also the assistant editor of the Philip K. Dick Society newsletter.

Lethem is married to Shelley Lethem, a bookseller, and earns a liv-



Jonathan and Shelley Lethem managing a McDonald's restaurant.

Artist **Lucy Synk** illustrates "The Cave."

Synk's work was quite a success at the recent Worldcon.

She won two awards at the art show, the popular choice in media award for "Nothing is Ever Forgotten," and the artists' choice in media for "White Rider," inspired by *Lord of the Rings*.

The Kansas City artist, who started out at Hallmark cards, just sold two paintings to *Dragon* magazine.

Synk spends much of her time traveling to conventions. She also took a trip to Italy recently.

All you Woody Allen fans should

Jan./Feb. 1989



Lucy Synk

get a kick out of **Greg Cox's** "Hana and His Synapses."

Cox also wrote "Almost Eleven" in our second issue (Dec. 1986).

He has a degree in chemistry, attended Clarion West, works as an editorial assistant at Arbor House (he recently gave up his job as a phlebotomist), and says he is male.



Greg Cox?

most of the time (see photo).

Cox's book, *The Transylvanian Library: A Guide to Vampire Fiction*, is due out soon from Borgo Press.

He says his favorite work so far is "The Homework Horror," which appeared in *Amazing* in May of 1987.

He recently had a story published in a necrophilia magazine and got paid in copies.

"Hana and His Synapses" is illustrated by **David R. Deitrick**.

Deitrick presented a slide show at the Worldcon, and did the masthead for the daily convention newsletter.

His wife, Laurie Deitrick, took two awards in the artists' amateur division.

Deitrick thinks that, for artists just getting started, "It's a good idea to go amateur and get some awards first, rather than go head to head with the pros right away."

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David R. Deitrick

Deitrick says the Worldcon suffered from some problems with communication and overbooked hotels, but the parties were great.

And he can't complain; he sold a couple of drawings and has a buyer negotiating with him on a large piece of art work.

The Deitricks are back in Alaska, where in early September it was "beautiful" with the leaves turning.

But David says his peripatetic family of four is planning a move back down to the lower 48 by next summer.

The poem "Pardon me for not speaking" is written by **Susan Noe Rothman**, a woman with 300 published

published for free copies."

Rothman, who has a masters degree in education, enjoys spending much of her day raising her 4-year-old daughter (in photo). She also teaches nursery school a few days a week and teaches creative writing to older youngsters in the summer.

Her husband, Chuck Rothman, is a computer graphics professional and an SF writer whose stories have appeared in Isaac Asimov's and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. He is the author of the novel *Starosomers* (Questar, 1986).

This will mark a repeat appearance in *Aboriginal* by **David Lunde** with his poem "In Great Silence, Listening." David has taken a sabbatical from his tenured university position in New York to travel with his

won again. Aboriginal finished second in the first-place voting, but third overall, behind *Science Fiction Chronicle*. As Hugo toastmaster Michael Resnick noted, it was a hell of an honor just to be nominated.

The Hugo winners are:

BEST NOVEL

The Uplift War

By David Brin

BEST NOVELLA

"Eye for Eye"

By Orson Scott Card

BEST NOVELETTE

"Buffalo Gals Won't You Come Out Tonight?"

By Ursula K. Le Guin

BEST SHORT STORY

"Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers"

By Lawrence Watt-Evans

BEST NON-FICTION

Michael Whelan's Works of Wonder

By Michael Whelan

BEST OTHER FORMS

Watchmen

By Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons

BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

The Princess Bride

BEST EDITOR

Gardiner Dozois

BEST ARTIST

Michael Whelan

BEST SEMIPRINTZINE

Locus

THE JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD FOR BEST NEW WRITER

Judith Moffett

BEST FANZINE

The Texas SF Inquirer

BEST FAN WRITER

Mike Glyer

BEST FAN ARTIST

Brad Foster



David Lunde

wife, Marilyn Nasiker, to Salt Lake City, Utah where Marilyn is obtaining her Ph.D. in physical chemistry, a four-year program.

David has recently sold a poem to Asimov's and learned that a poem, "Francois Villon," is being translated into French for inclusion in an anthology titled *Sometime the Cow Kick Your Head* — at least that's what we think he said.

David said he is using the sabbatical time to work on a science fiction novel.

Congratulations are in order for some award winners.

Connie Willis, who wrote "Circus Story" in *Aboriginal* No. 3 (Feb.-March 1987), has won the prestigious John W. Campbell Memorial Award for the best science fiction novel of 1987 for *Lincoln's Dreams*.

Pat Murphy's "Rachel in Love" took the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award for last year's best science fiction short story.

The Hugo winners were announced at the Worldcon. Aboriginal didn't win. As we predicted, *Locus*

Alien

(Continued from page 31)

tistic data. Trust the human beings to make a specialty of the study of falsification research! Eventually, of course, some of the falsification specialists will be caught cheating, whereupon more journals and research grants will be announced to accommodate the new subspecialty of falsification research. With only a modest amount of effort, the scientists can keep this thing going for quite a while.

The scientific research establishment is large, well-funded, and incredibly complex. And what's it all trying to accomplish? Building a machine that keeps a severed head alive, for one thing. It might not explain anything, but it's testable. □



Susan Noe Rothman

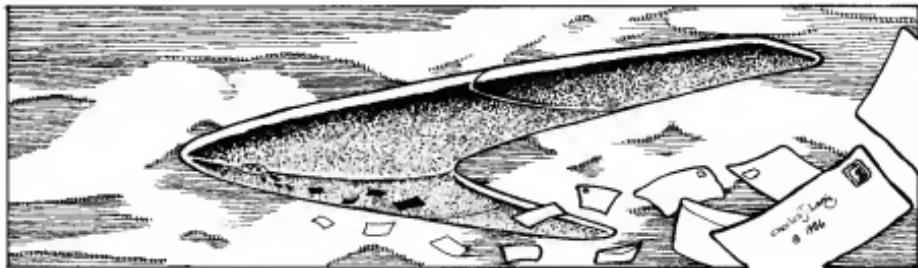
poems to her credit. Many of her science fiction poems have appeared in *StarLine* and *Beyond*. Other poems have appeared in *Writer's Digest*, *Newsletter Imago* and *Thirteen*.

She says she is now concentrating on SF because "it pays something. Most of my mainstream poems are

published for free copies."

The Hugo winners were announced at the Worldcon. Aboriginal didn't win. As we predicted, *Locus*

Jan./Feb. 1989



Boomerangs

Dear Charles,

Your Sept.-Oct. '88 issue was your best yet. What really made this issue for me was the theme of Reincarnation/Transformation that threaded throughout the stories, weaving them together into a unified whole I enjoyed Phillip Jennings' "Doctor Quirk" and Emily Devenport's "Cat Scratch" since I wouldn't get a chance at a second life, or third, or fourth.... And anyone who has lived under the boot-heaving tyranny of a wheelchair despot would be moved by Ann K. Schwader's "Killing Gramps." Patricia Anthony's "Good Neighbor" was touching in its beautiful and simple style. And while Greg Costikyan's "They Want Our Women!" didn't share in the theme of Rebirth/Change it was still the biggest bundle of laughs I'd read since "It Came From The Slushpile."

I don't know if you actually planned it this way, but if you decide to do another "theme" don't crow about it. Keep it as subtle and sublime as the Sept.-Oct. issue. (Oops, too late. We've already labeled #13 our "love" issue. — Ed.)

I loved *Aboriginal*'s first anthology. It gave me a chance to catch some good stories I had missed and reread a few I had enjoyed previously. The one touch that would have made the anthology perfect would be a reprint of Hsi Clement's article on the Alien Publisher's "Home System." (That's in our long-range plans. — Ed.) Alas, I lost my first issue during one of my numerous moves about the Bay area (have to keep ahead of the bill collectors ya know).

Don't change the name of *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. It's a terrific name, and completely in keeping with a magazine that prides itself on being "Tales of the Human Kind." For aren't we the aborigines of Earth? Australian bigots not

withstanding, I can imagine you picking up a lot of flak from the SF ghetto because *Aboriginal* is not a name that sounds spacy, or cosmic, or pompously literate. But please remember that the Hard-Core SF fans tend to be, as a group, a whiney and persnickety lot. *Aboriginal* is a different kind of name for a different kind of magazine. *Aboriginal* is offbeat and scrappy with a unique sort of humor, and you know how sadly lacking the SF ghetto is in humor. Compared to the straitlaced, conservative digests like *Analog* and *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Aboriginal* is an art nouveau explosion of color and style. A class act that needs a name to distinguish it from the rest.

Congratulations on almost winning the Hugo Award. I'm sure it would have looked great on the mantelpiece, or the trophy case, or the back of the commode, or wherever you keep things like that. But really you don't need some icon to tell you how good *Aboriginal* is, you've got us.

J.B. Neumann
Daly City, Calif.

Dear Mr. Ryan, Alien Publisher, et al.

In response to your question, "Do we keep the name 'Aboriginal'?" my vote is unequivocally, "YES!"

A perusal of Webster's yields the aboriginal synonyms: native, indigenous, and original. *Aboriginal*'s slick format, Alien Publisher, full-color gorgeous art, dual book reviews, and Aborigines column all speak of an original approach to the science fiction magazine genre. As a reader and subscriber of *Aboriginal*, I feel as though I have been welcomed into a family of people who appreciate the type of community science fiction that you offer. Other mags never gave me this sense of community. There is a definite feel to *Aboriginal*, expressed through the choice of stories, art, and columns, that other magazines lack. I

Comments From Our Readers

am not yet sure what it is, but that feeling has kept me interested in reading this magazine, unlike Asimov's and others.

Furthermore, *Aboriginal* is the offspring of a community of readers, editors, and artists who are natives of the science fiction community. It is thus indigenous to that community.

I believe that one of the reasons that you chose the name *Aboriginal* was tied to the concept of the Alien Publisher — in essence, this magazine is a reflection of the natives of this planet and worthy of examination by extra-terrestrial life forms that are interested in the ways that humans think, react, and behave. This idea is certainly valid — *Aboriginal* does fulfill that purpose. In addition, your choice of a title makes the statement that there is such a thing as aboriginal science fiction, that science fiction is a very real form of human literature and not just a passing fad. In fact, the name suggests that the science fiction in the magazine is somehow in touch with a more primitive core of human existence, and thus a legitimate reference in man's quest for his inner self. This is a direction that good science fiction and fantasy are taking, and this is reflected in *Aboriginal*. (Wow! We wish we'd thought of all that! — Ed.)

I believe that *Aboriginal Science Fiction* is not only a creative name, but a definitive one. It has shaped the growth of the magazine that we have come to love. To change it now would be an insult to what *Aboriginal* has become, as well as its future.

Besides, it's an interesting name that makes people stop and look at it at a newsstand.

Sincerely yours,
Brian Oliver
Lake Oswego, Oregon

Dear Mr. Ryan:

The name of our magazine is not just unique, it's arresting. In retail merchandising the idea is to make the customer look, attract and hold his attention long enough for the message to sink in. "Aboriginal" is a buzz word that grabs your eye and says "See me."

Don't ever change it, just never sell it in Australia.

Gregg B. Schuyler
Manchester, Conn.

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I feel that I must correct a mistake that was made in my letter (Issue No. 11 Sept.-Oct. 1988) which altered my original intent, however vague it may have been.

The letter should have read: "I finally quit reading Asimov's (the magazine) because I got very tired of reading Asimov (the editor)."

With all due respect for Mr. Asimov, while it is wonderful that he has a high regard for himself, I could do without his continually telling everyone how great he is... maybe it's just me.

Thanks,
Roger Richmond

(Sorry, but if you had phrased it the way you did this time, we wouldn't have cut it. While we have no arguments with Dr. Asimov or the magazine, we don't object to our readers expressing their opinions, as long as it is done judiciously. — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan and the Aboriginal bunch:

I am sitting here now doing something my family and friends would probably be shocked at: Writing a letter of my own free will! I feel that this monumental event can be traced directly to you and the Aboriginal crew, and the reasons are all good.

First of all, I wish to congratulate you on the advances made by Aboriginal since you sent a copy of your first issue to my best friend back in the days when you were sending out samples of the just-compiled first issue to prospective subscribers (we both sent our orders in within a day or two, but he didn't see his copy of that first issue again for a few weeks). I was there nervously biting my nails and hoping nothing had gone wrong when issue #4 was delayed, but when I did get it I was pleasantly surprised by the new format and the stories in that issue which were all of your usual outstanding quality. I'll admit that due to a period of moves that came not too long ago I didn't receive the first of the slick issues, #8, and I have recently reordered it, but I must say that your wish "to make Aboriginal the best-looking SF magazine in the field" has undeniably come true.

This brings me to the second reason that inspired me to write you:

your unequalled speed of reply. I mentioned above that I have recently reordered issue #8, among others. What I failed to mention was that I sent in my order less than 1 1/2 weeks ago, and received my back issues today. I've subscribed to many magazines and joined many clubs in the past, but the fastest "turn-around time" I had ever seen was about four weeks. YOU SHOCKED ME! At first I thought that the large white envelope in my mailbox was just another of those sweepstakes letters that Ed McMahon and the like send out, but when I saw the return address I couldn't believe my eyes or the fact that I now had my "lost issues." I'm eagerly looking forward to the next three years worth of Aboriginal! That I signed up along with my order for the "lost issues" (We have a small staff, so we aren't always that quick. Your order must have arrived just as we bundled a mailing. — Ed.)

But now comes the last (well, the last I'm going to mention here) reason, and the most important reason, that provoked me into writing you: the stories. I have loved every one you've printed, but I admit that I have a few favorites. The story that is probably my all-time favorite (so far) is "Search and Destroy" by Frederik Pohl from issue #4, but tied for a close second are "Sing" by Kristine K. Rusch and "The Milk of Knowledge" by Ian Watson. If you keep up this story quality (and I know you will) no one in their right mind will be able to argue that Aboriginal is not only the best-looking SF magazine in the field, but just plainly the Best. I personally feel that there is no argument now, and anyone saying otherwise had better be prepared to say why. There is only one word fitting to describe Aboriginal's past performance: Spectacular! And as far as the future is concerned: Here's to the Best, may you outshine the others forever. Keep up the EXCELLENT work ("good" wasn't fitting enough).

Faithfully awaiting my next issue,

Hans Gonzalez

P.S. — I have enclosed a check for \$11 for a copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo*.

Dear Charles:

First of all congratulations on being a Hugo nominee and congratulations on having a large enough circulation base so that you can be considered proxine.

I have always considered Aboriginal to be a proxine from its very beginning (So did we, but we didn't create the Hugo categories, and we weren't about to turn a nomination down. — Ed.)

As you probably know I have been very active in the small press area.

Most of my sales have been to small press magazines so I was very pleased when the small press category was developed for the Hugos. However, this category does not function properly. What you have is two radically different sets of publications competing with each other for the same award. On one hand you have publications of news and commentary such as *Locus*, *Science Fiction Chronicle* and *Horror Express* competing against magazines that are primarily prose/poetry publications such as your magazine, *Interrzone*, and *Space & Time*. The obvious solution is to restrict small press nominees to the second group and let the news and commentary publications compete in a new Hugo category. And while we are on the subject, the Hugo category for best professional magazine (which would be open to any publication based only on its payment rates and not on its circulation) ought to be revived.

Determining who is the best editor, should be a function of the SFWA's Nebula awards since professionals would have to deal with the editors and know them best. I mean just look at the different categories of editing. There are editors who do magazines, there are editors who put together a publisher's SF/fantasy line, there are editors who edit original anthologies, and editors who do reprint anthologies. There are some who do all four in the course of a year. It would simply make the Hugo ballot too long and complex in order for justice to be done to the various species of editors. Perhaps the best solution would be for the SF and fantasy editors to set up their own professional group and awards. (Since editors move around so much, how about the musical chair award? — Ed.)

Charles, this started out to be a congratulatory note but my pen seems to have gone berserk. So I will just end the letter now with one last comment. Yes, there should be a Hugo for best poetry. Congratulations again.

Sincerely,

Scott E. Green
Manchester, N.H.

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Just got the Sept./Oct. issue of Aboriginal in, and stopped to read "Good Neighbor." Wow! My heart goes out to anyone who reads this story, and doesn't feel something of what I felt. I can't wait to see what the rest of this issue is like. Every issue I've read has had a "Wow" buried in it somewhere. I assume the July/Aug. issue was the same, but I don't know, since I never received it. I feel deprived. Can you send me a replacement? I wouldn't want to miss

a "Wow." They aren't that easy to find.

Ever faithfully yours,
Michael Alterriba
Hialeah, Florida

(You didn't miss any Wows. See issue #12. There was no July issue. — Ed.)

Dear Charles,

I received my latest issue of *Aboriginal* yesterday. I read the magazine from cover to cover.

With regard to your problem with the ABO, I must say that it doesn't offend me in the least, and this from a former anthropologist. In fact, I liked it immediately. Any word can be misused in a derogatory manner. But if you feel the pressure of potential bigots to be too severe, I understand your reluctance to continue with the term. However, DO NOT change "Aboriginal"! That really caught my eye when your first notice for subscriptions arrived, and I was delighted with the title. It is unique, wonderful, and all kinds of other superlatives. After all, it is "Tales of the Human Kind," and, scratch the surface, we're all aborigines underneath.

Finally, I thought "They Want Our Women!" by Greg Costikyan was

absolutely hysterical. (I wonder if Mr. Peterson will ask for his money back after that one?) I also very much enjoyed "Cat Scratch" by Emily Devenport, as I am a person owned by three of the beasts. I thought Ms. Devenport did an excellent job of capturing "catisms" and how it might feel to be in a cat's body. "Good Neighbor" by Patricia Anthony was affecting and quietly poignant, without being overbearingly sentimental. It reminded me very much of Theodore Sturgeon's earlier work (I'm afraid he got a little mushy later). I found "Doctor Quick" by Phillip Jennings a little difficult to visualize, but interesting all the same. "Killing Gramps" by Ann K. Schwader was just a plain psychological horror story with some good technology thrown in. Not necessarily overly original, but also interesting. All in all, a good batch. The poems I hesitated to comment on, being a poet myself and realizing poetry is a highly subjective thing, but I found "Who Made the Stew on Betelgeuse II" quite delightful regardless of a couple of lines that don't scan as well as the rest.

I'm afraid I've run off at the word processor. I hope I haven't taken up

too much of the valuable time you spend editing your superb magazine. After years of *Analog* et al. (which I don't disparage by any means), yours is like a refreshing outdoor cafe with the drifting aromas of fresh espresso and hot spice rolls.

Sincerely,
(Ms.) Dominique E. Stevens
Grand Prairie, Texas

Dear Editor,

Before I start, let me say — there's money involved here, okay? So read through to the end of the following drivel, okay? Because, as they say, there's something in it for you. (That ought to appeal to your sense of greed.)

Now then.

It seems to me that your "Our Alien Publisher" discourses are becoming less insightful into the oddities of humanity and more — how shall I say — tiresome and boring.

Maybe it's about time you considered turning the magazine over to the more capable Human element. (Your editor, Charles C. Ryan, for example.)

Or then again I could be completely wrong.

On another subject, I think you

A Long Time Ago ...

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

Now, on his behalf, we'd like to give you an opportunity to see some of the best stories he collected a decade ago.

Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo (St. Martin's Press, 1979) features 12 stories by the following authors: Harlan Ellison, Brian Aldiss, Alan Dean Foster, Connie Willis, John Kessel, Kevin O'Donnell Jr., D.C. Poyer, M. Lucie Chin, Joe L. Hensley & Gene DeWeese, John A. Taylor, Gregor Hartmann, and Eugene Potter.

For a limited time, while copies last, you can purchase a first-edition hardcover copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* for \$10, plus \$1 postage and handling. If you would like your copy autographed by the editor, please indicate how you would like the note to read.

To order, send \$11 for each copy to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, Book Dept., P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.



should consolidate your subscription information to one place in the magazine. It's very confusing the way it is. Some of it's in the Boomerangs section, some of it's on the contents page. Issue #10 has some info in the Editor's Notes section, and you have separate sections for subscriptions and renewals. (To top that off, issue #10's editor's notes encourages us to "mark it as a renewal" when we renew. But tell me — where is there any place to mark that? I don't see one! If you use the renewal form it's not necessary to mark anything but the number of issues, right?) (True, but many people just send a check with a letter or use a new subscription form, so they need to mark it renewal to avoid a duplicate.) — Ed)

In any case, I love the magazine! (I should have mentioned that first if I suppose...) It's definitely to my liking (although some of your raving fan mail is a bit carried away).

So here's \$2 bucks. Renew my subscription and send me that free copy of your special anthology offered on page 58. (It's not made clear whether the 70 cents postage is required for those receiving the free copy of your special anthology. Please inform me if I owe you 70 cents. (You don't. We pay the postage if you order it with a renewal for 12 or more issues. — Ed)

Also, please send me writer's guidelines in the enclosed SASE. And I was wondering — is it still possible to get back issues? I'd love to get more copies if I could. (Yes — subject to supply. For instance we're out of #4 and #5. — Ed.)

Thanks in advance for printing this letter.

Paul David Littell
Grants Pass, Oregon

P.S. I like the plastic baggies. They protect the magazines from postal abuse very well, and they keep the stickers off my covers. Only one problem: If I throw the baggies away, I have no labels to check my subscription expiration by. If I keep the baggies, then I've got all this loose plastic floating around. What to do? (Cut out the label. — Ed.)

Dear Aboriginal editor and illegal alien publisher,

Two things: First — your current name is appealing enough to readers to have your subscriptions continue to increase. So, if it works, why fix it? I like it, and it's unusual enough to get me to subscribe after canceling Isaac's mag 3 years ago. Also, it is too bad Abo is a derogatory word in Australia, but it's certainly not here. (And is it? In Crocodile Dundee an aborigine calls himself an abo and was cast as a good friend of Croc.) It adds a casual charm to your endeavors, and gets away from the SF circle's tendency to take ourselves too

seriously. Personally I feel life, and science fiction, is to be enjoyed, and prefer your more lighthearted approach. But after all it's the excellence of your fiction that keeps us subscribing — right?

Thanks for much fine entertainment.

Sincerely,
Ellin Halgunseth
San Diego, California

Greetings,

I want to say thank you for doing such a good job with *Aboriginal*. The stories are great, the artwork complements and enhances them, and I like the way you use mostly new and less-well-known authors. Also, stick to the short story format, and, please, NO SERIALS. If I want to read a novel, I'll buy the book.

I ride a submarine, and often there is not time to sit down and read a chapter or two of a book, but I can usually make time for a short story while standing in the chow line, waiting for a training lecture to start, or before going to bed.

We share magazines and books a lot on this boat, but I make sure my Aboriginals come back, and I've suggested to certain people (with perpetually greasy hands) that they get their own subscriptions. I have a complete set, and someday they'll be worth some money (in addition to the reading pleasure).

So, you keep finding good stories and artwork to match, and we'll keep reading them.

Thanks,
Donald L. Johnson
San Francisco, California

P.S. Don't change the name, it's fine. And you got my Hugo vote this year. (Thanks. Maybe next year you can get the rest of the crew to vote? — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan:

I was a subscriber to the still-mourned *Galileo* and still have all my copies in their special binder and I was one of those hopeful subscribers who re-subscribed on speculation even after we had been told that further publication would probably not take place. That was some of the best money I ever spent, and when *Aboriginal* started arriving, my first thought was of the resemblance in content and editorial attitude in *Galileo*, which I now know is not without some basis. Congratulations on getting back into the game and thanks for the excellent publication that *Aboriginal* is. We've missed you.

Thanks so much for a great magazine.

Very truly yours,
Florence C. Nygaard
New York, N.Y.

Dear Charles,
Astonishing SF? Nah, too pulpy.
Appalling SF? Definitely not!
Amorphic SF? No, lacks definition.
Absymal? Too deep.
Arcturus? Spacy, but probably taken.
Anentropic SF? Too backwards.
Apocrypha? Yeeeeccccchhh!
Acrimonious SF? Puh-leaseez!

Damn it all, I just can't think of a name with one-tenth the off-beat flair that *Aboriginal* has. Don't change the magazine's title, there's nothing out there that can top it. (How about *Aboriginal SF?* — Ed)

Be Cool,
J.B. Neumann
Daly City, California

Dear Charles,

Re: the debate over the magazine's name, I suggest reverting to the word's Latin roots, and calling the magazine AB ORIGINAL

By splitting the word into two, you avoid the use of "ABO" with its negative connotations, plus you signal, albeit indirectly, the magazine's native: a magazine that seeks to be original, yet that looks to fundamentals, origins and roots as a basis for speculation. The more secure one's foundation, the more fruitful one's voyages outward.

If you'd like to use the idea, can I trade it for a 1% ownership interest? (Absence of profit is ok.) (Actually, the Latin root is already inherent in *Aboriginal* and one of the reasons it was chosen in the first place — Ed)

Best wishes,
Wendy J. Goedon
Maplewood, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Enclosed is my subscription for 12 issues of your magazine. I've found a few in bookstores and liked them very much, but they're not always easy to find. Better that I get them through the mail.

About the magazine's name: keep it. *Aboriginal* hints at foreign or alien cultures and far-away places, and I think this fits perfectly in a science fiction magazine. I'd be pleased to see you drop the subtitle, however: "Tales of the Human Kind." It suggests the type of human-centered speciesism that annoys me in so much science fiction — the very genre where such narrow-mindedness shouldn't be found. I'm talking about the "human is best" idea — where, even in books describing advanced alien cultures, you still get an underlying message that to be human is automatically superior to being anything else. Consider Star Trek's Data, for instance — what does he want to be human for? As an android, he has talents and capabilities far beyond those of any human, and human is not best. Then there was a

book I read back in spring, overall a wonderful book — but the human colonists of the planet were little more than rabble, the alien culture was noble and ordered, but still there was this underlying theme that the humans were somehow inherently better. It made me shudder. I'm not saying I found that prejudice in stories I've read in *Aboriginal*, but the subtitle annoys me somewhat, because it seems to hint at such things. But back to the name *Keep Aboriginal*, by all means. I agree, though, that if "ABO" is a derogatory term in Australia, it should be dropped. You could use ASF as an abbreviation. (Analog would yell — Ed.)

Also, I'd like to make a suggestion about the plastic-wrapper problem that was brought up in your letter column. Why not enclose the mailed magazines in a thin paper wrapper? I would imagine that the process of making plastic is far more damaging to the environment than the trees cut to make paper. And, as your reader pointed out, plastic is not very biodegradable. (Yeah, but paper isn't waterproof — Ed.)

Sincerely,
Jovanka Kink
Fairborn, Ohio

Dear Mr. Ryan,

First, allow me to join the ranks of the thousands who have extended their compliments on an outstanding magazine. The format, the story quality, the quality of the artwork, the reviews... the list goes on. Also, allow me to congratulate you on the Hugo nomination; it is well deserved.

Next, the Sept./Oct. issue: outstanding! "Doctor Quick," by Phillip C Jennings (to whom I am not related), appealed to the reader in me, as well as the resident hacker in my household. Mr. Eggleton's cover artwork, may I add, was outstanding.

Ann K. Schwader's "Killing Gramps" was one of those chillers I doubt I'll forget. Such stories rank high on my list, this one took the blue.

"Cat Scratch," by Emily Devenport, was her usual top-notch work. I enjoyed her other stories, but, a cat owner/lover myself, this was my personal favorite. When I finished reading it, I set some milk down for my cat. I've also started watching her closely; after all, one can never be too sure...

Greg Costikyan's "They Want Our Women!" had me laughing; my favorite character on *Star Trek* was always Mr. Scott, and, along with making a great story, Mr. Costikyan captured the accent perfectly.

Finally, it was refreshing to have some real feelings on the writers' strike from someone in the know (Susan Ellison, "Ghost Writing the Fall Season"). After being force-fed by the media for so long, it's a pleas-

ant rarity to have a real story.

Oh, yes! Enclosed is my renewal fee — with \$2 for the anthology — and a SASE; would you please send me a copy of writer's guidelines?

Keep up the good work, and good luck wherever Hugo!

Sincerely,
Brian W. Jennings
Ft. Pierce, Florida

To Charles C. Ryan, Editor,
Aboriginal SF

What's in a name?

Good question. For some, a name holds power or magic if you will. A name holds identity. A name holds spirit. To change that name changes the identity, changes the spirit.

The name *Aboriginal Science Fiction* speaks of origin and originality and spirit. Good spirit, open and wondering at all there is.

If it comes to a vote, this subscriber votes NO! to a name change. YES! to continued good reading.

I continue to read *Aboriginal*, it speaks for itself!

Hoyt R. McGuyer, Jr.
Mesquite, Texas

Dear *Aboriginal Science Fiction*,

I just received my second issue of *Aboriginal* and from what I've seen it appears to be a five-star production. There is just one problem, though... the price. I bought a six-issue

GOOD NEWS

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subscription and it cleaned up most of my allowance I realize that you have to eat, too, just like normal people, but 14 dollars for 6 issues is a little too much.

Last, you are running the stories by putting a third on page one, another on page 15 and yet another way in back. Could you try to keep the stories together, please?

Thank you,

Tommy Maryniak

Springville, N.Y.

(See Editor's Notes in this issue.
—Ed.)

Dear Editor,

I must apologize for the recent letter sent to you by one of our internees. He has decided to call himself "LAZER MAN." Regrettably our attempt to awaken his inner light using lasers has failed and we must now see to it that he is permanently confined to our precinct house in Seaside. You are not, to our knowledge, responsible for any acts of deliberate Hyper speeding tickets or other such balderdash.

Thanks to a break in the time warp factor of the interstellar Mono-cyanamide drive which is currently containing him in a state of abject dazedness he was allowed to send out this foolish letter which you very responsibly printed in your magazine. I have seen to it that he is now out of the picture and will not bother you again. Please accept my sincerest regrets for any embarrassment which "LAZER MAN" may have caused. I will not permit it to happen again.

Sincerely,

Dr. Fraudizing sur le Gâteau

Chairman and Chief Dimwit

Seaside Mono-cyanamide Clinic

(Huh? — Ed.)

Dear Editor:

As a more personal note now that I have done my official duty I would like to compliment you and your fine staff on the wonderful work which you do, and for your nomination for a Hugo. Keep up the good work. I have liked the size and format that you have used and hope it continues. Thankfully, you have also seen fit not to overburden your lovely color covers with trivial titles and other such drivel. I would like to see a section in your magazine on illustrations which could be removed for hanging or placing under my glass table top.

As for the name I love it. And I think that while our Aussie friends do have a point, we must not allow ourselves to stoop to the level of our inferiors by making an issue of race. It is important that we look beyond a regional disparity in name values. You could have easily chosen some "Z" word for your magazine. For the very same reasons with a little modification. You could have chosen

the words *Ad Nauseam* but that would have created a definite unfavorable slant. How about German *ABER*. Phonetically it sounds like the pronunciation of *Aboriginal*. Or you could have used *Abacus* since that would satisfy your other requirements and also would have implied a finite infinity. No the last is not impossible just not imaginable without considering the fourth and fifth dimensions.

Please continue the good work and nothing personal about "LAZER MAN."

Sincerely,

Orpheus H. Allison

Mapleton, Maine

P.S. Calling The Publisher Allie seems a bit trite and unbecoming of his esteemed dignity. Maybe O.A.P.I for Our Alien Publisher, Illegal. Or The Big Blue Frog from that Sixties Song. Better Yet, I buy Diesel for my car from Al's garage. Al is short for Althea and while she is not a frog, she does like seeing people.

I also hope that the protuberance which O.A.P.I is sporting is not a Cigarette, Cigar, or Pipestem. I would hate to think that his honor would be putting himself in danger of exploding. How does he like polyurethane? I might send him some high gloss clear coat car polish for Christmas.

Boomerangs.

What a disappointment to find Abo is a nasty word. Still, I hate to see you change the name. It's the magazine that makes the name, not the other way around. It's a little confusing at first, but isn't the SF field small enough that everyone who doesn't yet know what *Aboriginal* is will know soon?

You probably ought to take this with a grain of salt, since I'm inherently conservative. And I think the alien publisher gives you a nice angle on social criticism.

I liked the entire Sept.-Oct. issue, especially the Patricia Anthony story, "Good Neighbor." Lord, I like everything that woman writes! (Does she give classes?)

But each story had its own good points — Emaly Devonport's dip into the mind of an enfeebled person, Phillip C. Jennings' dip into a sitcom one, Ann K. Schwader's horror, and Greg Costikyan's lusty aliens.

And thanks for including poetry in the mix. A poem is a great cheap high. I especially liked "Against the Ebon Rush of Night," by Bruce Boston.

Bonita Kale

Euclid, Ohio

Boomerangs.

You're the best SF magazine since the large issues of Analog in 1962-1964.

The local book and magazine store has you shelved in the area of

Locus and "Writers" magazines.

I haven't enjoyed science fiction periodicals for a long time.

Thank you for restoring a good feel!

John Fitzsimmons
Cincinnati, Ohio

Mr. Ryan:

I am writing to offer my encouragement to you in your "name change dilemma". I understand the situation regarding the "Abo" nickname and its Australian usage, but I think that the magazine's name should remain *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. I have several reasons to suggest...

First and foremost, the name was the original attraction for me. I received a direct-mail subscription offer which did not explain the magazine in great detail, but did bring forth what I considered to be an interesting and attractive title. I gambled on a subscription less on the description of the new mag, but rather more on the name's character. It stimulated my imagination, and brought to my mind images of the "aboriginals" of far-flung planets — AND their exploitation by other, more advanced races. For me, the title was a story unto itself!

Along similar lines, I feel that the present title carries with it a wonderful sense of the bizarre — a characteristic I value highly. I think that you'd share my experience that science fiction readers are the sort of folk who seek out all things bizarre, looking for ideas, styles, images of things unusual and unworldly. The title now conveys all this and more.

Finally, there is a solid marketing basis for keeping the present name. In my experience as a broadcast engineer at several radio stations, I've had the opportunity to watch many stations change their call signs, slogans, and formats. This is sometimes the correct thing to do, either to save a failing property, or improve the ratings and income of a marginal station. In my experience, I've found that a very important attraction for listeners is **CONSISTENCY**. The listening public wants their station to be dependable, offering their style of music or info whenever they tune in. When a station changes its call sign or slogan (comparable to a magazine name change) the public is confused — the station loses the listeners it had as they search around the dial for the old favorite. Certainly a new few might be gained, but this does not compare to the number that fall through the cracks of the transition.

In the case of *Aboriginal*, I think that you're on the upward climb to success and would only be hurt by a name change. Just as the radio station risks coming out of a change worse off than before, so risks

Aboriginal. If you were losing money beyond expectations, with dropping circulation and declining hope for improvement, then a name change might be in order. As it stands, it would be a mistake.

In conclusion, I congratulate you and your top-notch staff on a wonderful magazine and wish you the greatest of success with your business. I'm always watching the mailbox for your next issue — keep 'em coming!

Sincerely,
Steve Johnston,
Chief Engineer
WGH Radio
Norfolk, Va.

(oops! The title and call sign slipped out — habit I guess. That'll teach me to write on letterhead!)

Dear Mr. Ryan and staff,

I just received my Sept./Oct. '88 issue of *Aboriginal*. The new issue is even bigger and better than the last one.

I have all of your issues (except one) and I believe *Aboriginal* is the finest magazine published in the known universe. It has been truly amazing to see the changes that have occurred in such a short time. The stories are all simply fantastic and the artwork adds that distinctive touch that puts *Aboriginal* ahead of similar publications. You guys should be a shoe-in for the Hugo Award this year. I hope to see *Aboriginal* as a monthly in the very near future since two months is a long time to wait for the next issue.

Enclosed is my check for self-renewal. I realize I'm a little bit early but I want to take advantage of your special anthology offer.

Thank you for your work in publishing such a great magazine.

Sincerely,
Tom Scanlan
La Mesa, California

P.S. I did not enclose the renewal coupon because I can't bring myself to carve up my magazine and remove part of the story "Killing Gramps" on the reverse side. (That's one page you can photocopy — along with the new subscription page, so you can pass along a form to a friend or two. — Ed.)

Dear Charlie,

In the issue #11, you said you wanted opinions on changes of *Aboriginal SF*'s name. You said you liked the idea of having a magazine that began with "A." Well, how about AGOG? It means much the same as amazing, astonishing and astounding, alphabetically comes before Amazing, Analog and Asimov's and is short.

According to the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (1979) no magazine has used that name. Frankly, I'm sur-

prised nobody has thought to use it (Of course, I don't know of any after 1979!)

Sincerely,
Brian Hall
Cape Coral, Florida

Hey *Aboriginal*,

I want one of your anthologies. I recently renewed at the special rate, so that means I owe you two bucks. How about a deal? I'll add six issues to my subscription at the special rate and buy a twelve issue subscription at the regular rate for my friend Troy Ballard. (Tell him Merry Christmas from his procrastinating buddy), and you send us both an anthology. Trust me, it's a good deal. If I know Troy, he'll be ordering back issues in no time. (I'm not letting him have mine.)

Keep those Robert Metzger stories coming. Seems like only a few issues ago I'd never heard of the guy. Now I'm hooked. Who is that math man anyway? And I guess you're right about art appreciation being a matter of taste. I'm acquiring a taste for Larry Blamire's work. Taste is strange sometimes. (But I still think you owe David Deirick a cover.)

Petty Protest #1: Now that the mailing label is off the cover art, you've replaced it with a UPC symbol. Boo. Hiss. Put that damn thing on the back cover. (We don't like it either, but we have no choice. — Ed.)

Petty Protest #2: You're changing your cover date to get in synch with your distributor?! So much for the straightforward approach of putting the actual publication date on each issue. I thought you liked being out of step. (Yeah, but not if *Aboriginal* is removed from the magazine racks

early because its cover date is two months behind those of other magazines. — Ed.)

OK, that's out of my system and I feel better now. What innovations do you have in store next? Never mind — surprise me.

Looney Eaves
Amarillo, Texas

Dear Alien Publisher,

Tell Darrell Schweitzer the later Foundation books are not too long — especially for fast readers with long commutes. Rebecca Ore's *Becoming Alien* (283 pages) is too long because it gets stale long before it ends. Harry Cushing's *The Life of Sir William Oster* (the fattest book I could lay hands on immediately — 1,372 pages not counting index) is not too long. If it ends and you still want more, it's too short (watch for a sequel). If it ends and seems just right, it is. If it doesn't seem as though it will ever end, it's too long, no matter how many pages there are.

Anne Turner
Springfield, Virginia

Dear Charlie,

Reading the Sept./Oct. issue put me in mind of my mother's button box.

When I was a little girl, my mom would save buttons from outgrown, worn-out clothes and re-use them on garments she would make for us. Often, as she sewed, I would poke through the copious contents of the old shoe box wherein they were kept. Some buttons had no match and were quite unique. She would tell me stories about them, what they were made of

(Continued to page 62)

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The Next Step

By Resa Nelson

Art by Pat Morrissey

"Hi there, Patti. How're you doing?"

I look up to see a freshman breeze into the lab. When he grins, he reminds me of the guys I used to have crushes on in high school.

"Fine." Even I can hear the suspicion in my voice. I'm not surprised he knows my name. There's only one quadriplegic guinea pig at the med center. I just can't figure out how this kid got into the lab.

He pulls a chair up beside me, turns it around, and straddles it as he sits down. "I'm John Vickers. I'll be replacing Dr. Michaels as your programmer." He sticks out his right hand.

"I'm sorry, Doctor. I thought ..." I can't find the right words. Stupid. I can't do anything right anymore.

His laugh seems genuine. "Don't worry about it." His right hand is still extended toward me. "Show me your stuff."

I take a deep breath and struggle to remember the command. "RA one-ninety." I can't feel the electrical impulses generated by the computer, flowing through the wires to the implants in my muscles. My hand extends toward him.

He shakes it. "Not bad." He withdraws his hand. "Show me a fist."

"No one has programmed a fist for me, Doctor."

"It's John. You can lower your arm, Patti. Can you give me an idea of what you can and can't do?"

John. He wants me to call him John. My fear that Dr. Michaels would send a replica of himself has just been relieved.

So I tell Doctor — John — how the implants have been programmed to manipulate my limbs. There's not a lot to tell. Dr. Michaels's theory was let's get her up and running. I don't think he was able to differentiate between me and the computer that directs my movements.

John takes notes as I give him the few details I know. Quietly, he says, "Dr. Michaels told me what happened on Friday."

I feel a flush creep across my face. "I don't know how it happened. I was so scared ... I just lost control."

He nods, chewing on the end of his pen. He seems to choose his words carefully. "Dr. Michaels is anxious for the project to succeed. He might have expected too much too soon. I'd like to take a different approach if you don't mind."

I release my breath, unaware that I was saving it

up. Mind? How could I possibly mind? Any change will be an improvement.

He makes more notes as he speaks. "We'll start with the little things. Let's check the comfort of your microphone headset and the pocket computer. We'll shoot for more effective programming, simple exercises. Practice. Simpler voice commands. I want to tweak the voice recognition, get the bugs out. We'll build up your large muscle groups — you can't expect them to hold you up in an atrophied state."

Dr. Michaels did. And his disgust was clear when I became hysterical as the aides caught me when I fell last Friday. He shouldn't have made me try to walk so soon.

"How are the therapists and the aides treating you, Patti?"

His question startles me. Dr. Michaels never gave me more than a mechanical smile. John is looking at me and waiting to hear what I have to say. "All right. They're pretty nice."

"It must be hard for you not having any family here with you."

"It's not so bad." I hear my voice tremble. "I think it would be harder if they were here."

He puts his notes aside and props his arms on the seat back. "How have you been holding up?"

"How do you mean?"

He taps the side of his head. "Up here."

"Not bad." In my mind I shrug. "Not good."

He stares at me, chin resting on his propped arms. "Who's your favorite singer?"

"What?"

"Your favorite singer. Who moves you? Who makes you glad to be alive?"

Surprised, I find myself smiling.

I feel like a little girl who's been told she can keep a pony in the back yard.

"John!" I call out as I see him enter the lab. "Look at my arms!" I give the commands to raise and flex them.

He pats my head. "You have wonderful arms."

"No, really. Look at my muscles — I've never had muscles like these before. Ever."

"Nautilus works wonders."

I feel a pout coming on. "I thought you'd like my muscles."

"They're just as nice as they were yesterday."

Oh. I suppose I have been showing them off to



PAUL MORRISSEY

everyone for a while, including the therapists who lift me in and out of the Nautilus machines every other day.

"I brought you a present." On the desk in front of me, John spreads out a map of the campus. "The art museum is here. Natural history museum here. Planetarium. Main library — also, there's a satellite library just a few blocks from here."

I haven't been outside the med center in weeks. "Can we go now?"

"You've been getting around just fine in that wheelchair. I think it's time for you to solo."

A thread of fear comes loose. "Can't you come with me?"

He leans against my desk and crosses his arms. It's a sure sign of trouble. "I can hold your hand all the way if you want, but I'm not sure that's going to do you a whole lot of good."

"People will stare at me."

John shrugs. "Not if you stay locked up in the lab all your life." He glances at his watch. "I've got to go to a meeting. I'll see you tomorrow, Patti."

"John... what do you want me to do?"

He stares at me for a moment before walking out. "Whatever's right."

When I was in college — before the accident — I had a gymnastics class. On the first day I told my instructor that I couldn't vault. "It's easy," he said. "Just be sure to get your hips up to go over." I told him that wasn't the point — every time I had tried to vault when I was in high school, I crashed into the vaulting box. The point was that I was terrified. My instructor said "OK" and walked away. I stood on the spring board, put my hands on the box — sure enough, I was able to get my hips up. I spent the entire day and nearly the entire semester vaulting.

I know John's acting like this for my own good. But there's no law that says I have to like him for it.

Rolling out of the med center and down the sidewalk isn't so bad. Easy access surrounds me; it seems as if people are acclimated to the sight of a wheelchair. All right, John. You're forgiven.

Entering the library is easy. Traveling inside it is not. Silence is suddenly pierced by whispers. I can't make out exactly what everyone says, but I know who the target of conversation is. Then some idiot gasps.

I can't stand to pass by them again. I manage to make it to the stacks and hide among them before I can fall apart. Please, Patti. Just hang on. Calm down. Then I remember the look in their eyes.

I hear a cart being pushed behind me. It stops. Books are being shelved.

There's a soft voice. "Don't mind them. They all just want your autograph and they're too shy to ask." The voice and the shelving of books are getting closer. "I've seen the articles about you in the campus paper. It's not every day we get a celebrity in here."

I hold my breath as he squeezes in between the side of my wheelchair and a stack of shelves. He reaches over me. For a moment I'm afraid he's glanced at my face and knows how close I am to crying.

He takes his time, slowly retrieving books from

the cart, casually discovering where they belong on the shelves. "I saw your picture in yesterday's paper. Doing Nautilus. Your muscles are getting bigger than mine."

He stands next to me, wearing shorts and a T-shirt. His muscles are long and lean, finely contoured. I hear myself giggle.

He shakes his head. "I'd hate to meet you in a dark alley." He examines me for a moment, and I wonder if he thinks I'm a freak. "Are you able to stand up yet?"

I shake my head, suddenly ashamed of the progress I haven't made.

"I don't know what book you're looking for, but if it's too high for you to reach I'll be glad to get it for you." He winks at me as he walks away. "Just ask for Mark."

I will. I get the feeling I'm going to be checking out a lot of books.

"Stand up, Patti."

Fear has become automatic since the day Dr. Michaels let me fall. "Will you catch me if —"

"I'm right here. Everybody's here. We'll catch you the moment it looks like you're having trouble." John's patience never falters.

I've positioned my wheelchair at the ends of the parallel bars. I give the commands to place my feet on the floor. Hands on the arms of the wheelchair. Lean forward, arms extended.

I'm standing. Oh, God, I'm....

Falling!

John and the therapist grab me. It was awful, like falling off a building.

John's voice is firm. "You're all right, Patti. We'll keep you up — I want your hands on the bars."

John has spent so much time working out the commands for this exercise; I don't have the heart to disappoint him. My hands grasp the bars. The therapist lets go.

"John!"

"I'm still holding you up. I'm shifting around behind you. Believe it or not, you're doing most of the work right now."

Suddenly I'm in awe. Maybe this project is going to work after all. If I'm holding myself up, maybe I can walk.

John instructs the aides to adjust each bar until we find the best height. I know his arms are strong around me.

"Let her rip, Patti."

I take a couple of deep breaths. That helps, but I can't make myself say the word. I keep thinking about falling off the building. They keep waiting for me — the aides, the therapist, and John. He's worked so hard. I want him to be proud of his work and of me.

My voice sounds small and weak. "Walk."

My hands shuffle along the parallel bars just as John has programmed them to. And then I see my feet. Moving.

And my legs. I can see the large muscles in my legs as they contract. "I'm walking!" All I can think of is Roo in *Winnie-the-Pooh* when he falls in the river; as he's swept away, bobbing up and down, he calls out,

"Look at me swimming!"

The room is silent except for my nervous laughter. I give the halt command. There are footsteps behind me — behind me?

"I let go," John says. "You did most of it alone."

Oh, John. I'm swimming, I'm swimming.

*** * ***

I realized from the beginning that John has been kind to me because it's in his best interest to do so. I don't mind. His kindness makes our marathon programming sessions bearable. Every time I think we've talked about everything, John thinks of something new. At times I think we're as close as friends can get. I'd like to think that we'll keep in touch when the project is over. But I have to face reality. I keep reminding myself that John is the researcher and I'm the laboratory rat.

I've mastered the parallel bars. I've been working on them so long that John has a running joke, saying I'm ready for the unevenes.

Actually, I know he's anxious for me to try walking without the bars, completely on my own.

I just can't do it.

I don't understand why I'm so afraid. It doesn't make any sense. I try to behave like a rational human being, but when I try to walk without the bars I panic.

John has stayed late again, long after everyone else has left. He's constantly creating and refining more complex programs. I'd like to be able to walk for him, but my fear outweighs my desire to please him.

He drops a flat carton on the table in front of me, walking back to the door to pay the delivery boy.

Pizza. The aroma alone is ambrosia. I speak commands quietly into the mike on my headset, and my hand lifts the lid and grasps a slice. Not quite right: Instead of sliding under the pizza, my hand rotates the wrong way and my fingertips sink into it. Oh well. Nice try.

"Patti!" John yanks my hand out of the pizza and wipes tomato paste from it frantically. He pulls the plastic lid off a cup of diet Coke and shoves my fingertips into it. Trembling, one of his hands rests on top of mine. "That pizza is hot," he says quietly. "You just burned your hand. This will speed up the healing. The longer you keep it in, the better."

I look at the pizza, tomato paste dropped like blood on the carton and the table. My hand in a cup of diet Coke. Hot. Cold. They're only words to my hand.

"You've got to be more careful," John says, letting go of my hand.

"I just forgot."

He checks the pizza, picks up a slice, and folds it lengthwise with the crust on the outside. I once had a friend from New York who always ate pizza that way. "Here," he says, placing it in my other hand. As I eat, he says, "You need someone to watch over you."

He takes a slice for himself and takes a bite. He doesn't look at me, knowing I'm taken aback by his comment. Night after night, he hasn't just worked on programming me. We've talked — he's told me about his childhood, his marriage, his divorce, his career, his hopes and dreams. And I've told him mine. "John, you know I want to take care of myself. I'm not going to move in with my parents."

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"I didn't mean that," he says, still looking at his pizza. "I think you should live with your boyfriend."

"I don't have a boyfriend. You know that."

"You should," he says, looking at me.

"A boyfriend." The edge in my voice is harsh and brittle. "No man is ever going to want to date me."

"Why not?"

He's not kidding. The expression on his face is serious. "John—" Hell, I'm feeling shy. Come on, Patti. John isn't just your doctor, he's your friend. You've confided in him as much as you've ever confided in anyone. Go for broke. "What about sex?"

"What about it?"

"I'm as good as dead from the neck down. What man wants to have sex with a corpse?"

"Patti, there are options."

Suddenly, his gaze feels too intense, as if he's interested in me, as if he's the one who wants to make love to me, and I look away, embarrassed that I could think such a thing. I feel his hand, gentle as it strokes my hair, gentle as it cups my face. I look at him. "We've talked about everything else," he says. "I think it's time to talk about sex. There are acts you're perfectly capable of doing now, and others that I can program your body to do...."

I envision John programming me, testing it himself by making love to me — then shake the thought from my head. "Why should any man want me when he could have a real woman?"

John groans, shaking his head. He draws closer, making me feel more nervous. "Patti, you're intelligent, you're enthusiastic — everyone who has ever worked with you has been crazy about you."

"Except for Dr. Michaels."

"Screw him," John smiles. "Actually, don't screw him. You're too good for him. Patti, you're as attractive on the outside as you are on the inside, and that's something rare."

"But —"

"Any man who is good enough for you will see that. And if he has an ounce of common sense, he'll see beyond the implants and wires...."

Beyond my wires. "Mark...."

John pauses. "Mark?"

There's something stirring, a kind of hope I haven't felt in a long time. "Mark. He's always treated me like everyone else. He's never acted squeamish—"

"Mark at the library?" John frowns, then stands up and paces.

"I'm not going to proposition him. I'm just saying he's a possibility — someone to watch over me, like you said. He's always flirted with me. Maybe I should try to feel him out."

"I don't want you to get hurt."

"What? You're the one who brought up dating. Doesn't that mean I should be willing to take a chance? Or maybe I should live the rest of my life locked up in the lab."

"Forget it. Just forget what I said."

"Why are you so mad at me?"

John stops abruptly and runs his hands over his face then back through his hair. "I'm not mad at you, Patti. I just feel concerned about you sometimes. Why

don't we take a break, say, half an hour."

All I can think of is Mark. He's working at the library tonight — he should be there for another couple of hours. Maybe I should feel him out. "I'd rather call it a day."

"All right," he says. "I'll be in my office if you need anything."

As he walks away, I look for a book that needs returning.

Mark is alone in the library, shelving books. I stop my wheelchair in front of his desk.

He grins at me. "Hi, Patti."

I give the commands. My feet plant themselves on the floor. My hands grip, body weight shifts, arms extend. I feel radiant as I show Mark how I can stand.

He beams. "Patti! When did you start walking?" "Walk? He thinks I can walk?"

I feel the fear coming back, but I concentrate on Mark. If I look and act like a real woman again maybe he'll be able to see beyond my implants and wires. Maybe he'll think of me as more than a friend, someone he could be attracted to.

"Walk," I say.

I'm moving. By myself.

My legs — the wires seem to tangle, and the floor drops out from beneath me and slams against my face.

After the room stops spinning, I see Mark crouching beside me. I'm helpless. Goddamn it, I'm helpless! John hasn't programmed a command to make me rise from a fall. "Please put me back in my chair." I'll be safe in my wheelchair.

Mark reaches for me and his hand jerks back. He looks and sounds flustered. "I don't want to hurt you."

Without meaning to, I speak harshly. "Pick me up and put me in the chair."

He struggles clumsily with my body, nearly letting me fall again. Drops of sweat fall from his face. "You scared the hell out of me. What happened?"

I can't help but stare at him, shocked.

It permeates his voice. It's all over his face as he trembles, wiping his forehead with his sleeves. Some people, like the ones who stared at me on the day that I met Mark, are disgusted at the sight of a cripple.

Others don't feel that same disgust until they touch one.

I hand the book, overdue, to him before I leave.

John's office light is on. How could I have listened to him? How could I have thought that Mark could ever be attracted to me? How could I have thought he was flirting with me?

How could I have forgotten that I'm not just a cripple but a freak?

My room is down the hall, but there's no sense in staring at the ceiling all night. I go to the lab and stop in the middle of the room. Falling wasn't so bad. Now that I've done it, I think I can handle it. If I can't, I deserve to lie on a cold floor until morning.

I stand. This has to be it. I can't do it to make Mark like me or to please John. I want to do it for me this time.

"Walk."



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The wires don't tangle. I'm free.

I make myself stop. For a moment, my body wavers between stability and disaster. Something else is happening. I'm not just walking, I'm *feeling*. Hate. For the drunk who did this to me. Somebody please put him in front of me and put a gun in my hand. I can pull the trigger now. I can pull it six times.

My scream resonates in the empty lab.

John runs into the room — stops. And stares. "God damn." He looks at the wheelchair behind me.

Boomerangs

(Continued from page 55)

and where they came from.

That shoebox was like a treasure chest to me, filled with jewels instead of mere buttons. There were thick, flat buttons for keeping coats closed against the severest gale, and beautiful "mother-of-pearl" blouse buttons that she said were made from real seashells that grew deep in the ocean. And way at the bottom were tiny pastel buttons, small as a baby's fingernail, that came from infant sweaters knitted long ago.

The stories in this issue are like all those special buttons, each a jewel in itself to be admired and treasured.

I never throw away a back issue of *Aboriginal*.

Perhaps some day my daughter will wander through the stories like I wandered through the buttons, picking up and examining each one, reading "favorites" and building her own memories. Thanks once again for a very enjoyable collection.

And lest you thought I forgot...

Congratulations on your Hugo nomination. No one deserves it more than you and the hardworking staff of *Aboriginal/Science Fiction*.

Best wishes go with you,

Lillian McManus

Westwood, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Please don't change your name! This is the most (*Aboriginal*) magazine I've ever found. In fact, it is the only SF magazine I've ever wanted (and have) to subscribe to.

The stories (fictions as the publisher calls them) and articles are well written and interesting. The authors seem to be intelligent and well informed. And the book reviews are concise and trustworthy — I've agreed on all but one of the ones I've read.

I'm sorry that Abo is regarded as slanderous and just goes to show that ignorance and hatred hurt everyone who comes into contact with them, not just those it is aimed at.

Simply ASP would work if you couldn't find a better contraction. But

you must remain *Aboriginal*.

I would also like to reply to Gitt Peterson Jr. on his review of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. I agree that the original was much better, but I also feel that Gene Roddenberry was wise not to make the characters carbon copies of the original crew. That would be a rip-off and other shows have tried that and died.

Capt. Picard may not be a Great Hero like Kirk, but Mr. Peterson is the first person I have ever heard call him a wimp. If Dr. Crusher had the same personality that McCoy had, you would (I would) consider her a harlot, which she is not.

I agree that there are too many children on the ship, and at least wish that more of them had two parents.

Lt. Worf was raised on a farming colony by humans, and did spend several years in Starfleet Academy. And if you need an adversary, the Romulans are still at large.

As far as the movies go, add my name to your club, ST I, ST IV, then II and III.

Congratulations on a fine magazine.

Live long and prosper,
Guy Wayne Hubert
Franklin, N.C.
P.S. Say Hi to the Frog.

Dear Folks,

On the subject of your name, I vote for no change, for three reasons. The first is that, while bigots are uncouth, spineless wimps are untrustworthy. You never know what important issue they will duck to avoid hurting somebody's feelings. This brings me to point two. It is not reasonable to assume that you founded a magazine and gave it a weird name just to insult a disenfranchised minority group on the other side of the world. Insult is at least partially a matter of intent, and I doubt that you intended to insult anybody.

The last reason I have for wanting you to keep the name is the main one. I have always thought it was a dumb name. In a world where names are researched by experts on psychology and marketing (giving us mellifluous garbage like *Navistar*), it is nice to see that regular, fallible humans are free to foul up and yet still succeed. I have occasionally regretted being

My tears slow to a point where I can speak — and then I realize that I'm still standing. I seem to have achieved some sense of balance. And then I know I'm smiling. I can feel it.

John's arms are around me, as strong as when he helped me walk using the parallel bars. Stronger.

His laughter calms me. Then, in my ear he whispers, "Want to go out for a pizza?" □

Dedicated to Elizabeth A. Lynn and the class of Clarion 1985.

called Marcus Greek (in Classical Mythology 110, for instance, or on the day I met Tony Roman), but I wouldn't change it, despite the inexplicable hurt and insult my name appears to have caused an occasional ethnic Greek (my ancestry is English). Stick by your mistakes, they will make you unique.

Sincerely,
Marcus Greek
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I just received my first issue of *Aboriginal* a few days ago and enjoyed it very much.

I was interested in your comments concerning the name of the magazine. Changing the magazine's name once it has become known to people is probably ill-advised. If no offense was intended, none should be taken. Unfortunately, people don't always see it that way.

If you do consider a name change, *Ad Astra* might be a good choice. You could keep your good luck charm and alphabetical superiority.

Sincerely,
Susan C. French
Scotia, New York

Dear Charlie,

Just received issue #11 (Sept.-Oct. 1988) and have completed reading all the non-fiction stuff. (Am I strange, or do other people read magazines in this order, too?) Several comments/questions.

First. I renewed in March, 1988 (check cleared, anthology received, everything seemed okay). Attached below is the label from my new issue taken straight from the not-now-but-maybe-in-the-future-will-be-biodegradable-plastic wrapper (are times that tough that you are willing to sacrifice your dignity by answering the Hoffman letter for the sake of saving the few bucks from one subscription?).

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Well, Despite the fact that I make my living as a professional bean-counter, and thus am not uncomfortable with interpreting numbers that should not be overly complex, such as those shown above, you've got me this time. The only numbers that appear similar (as far as renewal info is concerned) are the 11 on my label and the 14 in the sample. Of course, they're not in the same place, and, as can be derived from the beginning of this item, the number on my label should be much higher — say, 28 or so. Your help in solving this mystery would be greatly appreciated. (The new computer company goofed. See issue #12. — Ed.)

Second, DO NOT take Aboriginal out of the name of your magazine. It is one of the appealing features of your publication, not to mention distinctive. I am afraid, however, that I agree with your decision to stop referring to your youngest child as "ABO". Careful scientific research has, luckily, revealed that there are at least 47 three-or-more letter words that can be found in the word "Aboriginal". Further, the three word phrase "Aboriginal Science Fiction" contains a total of 126 such words. Since the acronym ASF is obviously not acceptable (too close to *Analog's* ASF), I suggest you run a contest wherein your readers would use the letters from your official title to develop a new nickname. At the risk of ending the contest before it even starts, I herewith submit my own entry — "FABO". Note its trifocal advantages: easy to remember, accurately descriptive, and inclusive of the old nickname! I leave the decision as to my prize in your able hands, knowing that you will realize that my efforts are simply one more example of why I have come to be known throughout the world of science fiction as your mentor.

Once more, thanks for a fine issue. I can't wait to read the rest of it.
Confused yours,
R. Alan Hauptmann
Clovis, New Mexico

Dear Madam, Sir, or Crazy Alien:

Since it seems to be obligatory for everyone to read a magazine and then write asking for more sex/violence/lesbians/ray-guns etc., and since I feel a need to protect myself from them getting in their preferences first, I will write too, and file my report card:

I just love "Good Neighbor" (by Patricia Anthony) and "Cat Scratch" (by Emily Devenport) and like "Killing Gramps" (by Anna K. Schwader) okay, and haven't read the others yet.

Does taking out a magazine

subscription make all these folks feel they are entitled to run the magazine now, instead of just enjoying it and letting others enjoy theirs too? Too weird?

Sincerely,
Susan L. Johnson
Arlington, Virginia

Editor's Notes

(Continued from page 39)

our current sell-through percentage.)
So, 40,000 times \$3. Right?

Nope.

Publishers usually get about 40 percent of the cover price for single-copy sales. So it's 40,000 times \$1.20 or \$48,000, or a loss of \$31,000. The rest has to come from subscriptions, renewals and advertising. Normally, it costs a magazine money to get each new subscriber. And 40,000, or even 100,000, is too small a circulation to attract any real advertising.

If the cover price were \$5, the return would be \$96,000 and the magazine would break even on single-copy sales — except no one would pay \$5 a copy, because everyone has been conditioned to think magazines should be cheaper than beer.

Now you can see why the big corporations think advertising is such an important part of the equation for magazine publishers. And why it's unlikely any of them would ever do what we are doing.

You can also see why I say that the cover price and subscription price are kept artificially low by a competitive market geared toward magazines with circulations in the millions. From a practical point of view, the big magazine publishers are more interested in selling ads than magazines and will just about give the magazines away to get a circulation high enough to attract those ads.

You can also see why many experts think magazines like *Analog* and *Asimov's* (and *Aboriginal*, of course) are an endangered species in an increasingly competitive and corporate marketplace.

And, of course, you can see why the experts think we'll never accomplish our goals — and why our publisher has to be a crazy alien.

So, are we going to price *Aboriginal* where it should be, at \$3 per copy?

No. We only want to tackle one impossible task at a time. And, at the moment, our impossible task is building a full-color, full-slick science fiction magazine that we believe can break that 100,000 circulation barrier *Analog* and the others have been stuck at for decades. Of course, we still have quite a way to go.

Do we think it really is an impossible task?

No. Because the experts have left out one very important part of the equation:

You.

They think readers of science fiction are cheapskates and aren't willing to pay realistic prices for a slick science fiction magazine.

We disagree. We think you are ready for the kind of magazine we are building.

If you agree, you can help make it happen.

As of the filing of our annual postal statement on Sept. 29, 1988, we had a bit more than 12,000 subscribers. If, in the next month, each of you were to give a subscription as a Christmas gift to a friend — or photocopy the subscription form on page 13 and use it to get one friend to subscribe — we would have 24,000 subscribers.

Then, if each of our subscribers did it again, we'd have 48,000 subscribers, and so on...

You can see where it could eventually lead.

Mind you, we don't really expect that to happen.

But at least we thought you ought to know why we keep saying we are trying to do the impossible.

We like a challenge. Do you? □

Pardon me
for not
speaking
By Susan Noe
Rothman

*at luncheons like this
I always want to say
something
but I shouldn't
and I won't
after all when your best
friend
is the main course
what more can you say
but
thank you —*

Covers for your walls



Aboriginal #1



Aboriginal #2



Aboriginal #3



Aboriginal #4



Aboriginal #5



Aboriginal #6

The Aboriginal Art Gallery

The Aboriginal Art Gallery is your chance to obtain a glossy print of one or more of the illustrations used for our early cover art. The prints are as crisp and as sharp as the original artwork and have a clarity we could not reproduce in issues 1-7.

These covers are big. Most of them are 11 by 14 inches and are mounted and matted, ready for framing, at \$35 each.

Each is also available unmounted for only \$25.

For more information, or to order prints, please write to:

The Aboriginal Art Gallery
c/o Aboriginal SF
P.O. Box 2449
Woburn, MA 01888-0849



Aboriginal #7



Aboriginal #8